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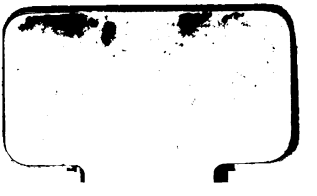
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AUNT FRANK'S BIBLE STUDIES

CAROLINE A. E. COLE.







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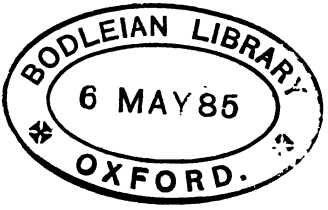
THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS ON EVENTS AND CHARACTERS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT FROM THE CREATION DOWN TO SOLOMON.

BY

CAROLINE A. E. COLE.

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Dedication.

I Dedicate this Little Book

To you, my dear nephews and nieces, who are living in Europe, Asia, America, and Australia, with the hope that you will accept this tribute of love as a voice from one who is desirous that you should 'search the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.'

Without a spiritual foundation, what bulwark can your souls possess that will be sufficiently strong to enable you to 'shun profane and vain babblings,' which are so rife in the present day, assuming the forms of Freethought, Agnosticism, and what is

termed Intellectual Progress, which only 'gender strife and foolish and unlearned questions'?

If these simple papers attract you to the Word of God, to examine how far the points stated in them agree with Holy Writ, my reward will be ample; for it is impossible for any human soul to be spiritually interested in God's Word without becoming purer, happier, and possessing that unconscious influence which alone can elevate humanity.

That the Holy Spirit may lead, guide, and teach you, is the earnest wish of your affectionate

AUNT FRANK.

'WESTFIELD,'
CHEAM ROAD,
SUTTON, SURREY.

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I.

THE CREATION AND FALL.

NOTHING but love, unbounded love, could have caused God to create this beautiful world. He needed it not for His own happiness, for joy reigned in Heaven, 'when the morning-stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.' But an increase of glory shone around the heavenly throne when God looked upon the work of creation and said, "It was very good.'

We read that God rested on the seventh day. What instruction may not we learn from that one sentence! We see God rested; therefore there must have been previous action. If we are to be like God, we, too, must be active. Work is something high and noble. It is dignified and glorified,

because our Father in Heaven is ever active. 'He neither slumbereth nor sleepeth.'

When God created man, He did not leave him without occupation, but placed him in a garden containing every kind of beautiful fruit. By tending and keeping this garden in order, Adam would see the result of his own labour, the success of which would bring its own reward.

Has not God given to each one of us a garden to keep, the watching and tending of which will likewise bring its own reward? That garden is each one's heart. If neglected, the weeds of destruction will destroy every blossom that would have in time borne fruit. We know that weeds and fruit cannot occupy the same spot. Nor will the evil and the good both equally flourish in the heart. The one or the other must triumph. Therefore, let each one watch his own heart, that it may become at last a garden so fruitful, that our Saviour may delight to dwell therein.

Looking at that lovely earthly Paradise

where Adam was placed, we may justly enquire, How could Adam and his wife commit sin there?

Survey their surroundings. Where was the call for envy, ambition, hatred, or malice? They had no compatriots of whom to be jealous, lest they should share the bountiful gifts that were spread around them. No feelings of envy could struggle in their hearts, for fear another should be preferred before them. There they dwelt; two souls fresh from their Maker, with no antecedents to stain the purity from which they sprang, and Adam was endowed with such knowledge, that as each fresh creation was brought before him, he was enabled to appoint to it its most suitable appellation. Such unity was there between the Creator and the creature, that when Adam and Eve heard a voice in the garden, they knew it was the voice of the Lord. Until they had sinned, that voice had been the joy of their home.

Now, in looking back, after the lapse of

nearly six thousand years, can we at all unravel the mighty problem, that he, our first earthly father, should, by his own free will, cast aside the good and choose the evil? We cannot judge Adam from ourselves, for he did not then possess our sinful nature. As the human soul must ever increase in weakness when it rests in its own strength, so Adam and Eve lost the satisfaction of their sweet surroundings by not consciously dwelling upon the presence of their Maker. Thus their earthly Paradise became a snare, by daily displacing the higher attributes of the soul, so that when their trial-day came, it proved they had lost the balance for good, and that their own wills predominated over the righteous will of God.

Ah! if the Second Adam had thus fallen, when Satan appeared to Him in the wilderness, we should have had no robe of righteousness to cover us! But the robe, which was lost in Eden, is again found upon all them who, through faith, believe in Jesus Christ. Need

we wonder then, that they who are called to be the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, must pass through a crucible more fierce and more purifying than that passed through by Adam, who, when the temptation arose, fell without any resisting power, because he had been satisfying his soul from those cisterns that held no spiritual waters?

Yes! Adam had only the Evil One to combat with, and by his fall he proved that purity alone is not strength.

He alone can be called strong who, though tempted by the triune power of sin, namely, the world, the flesh, and the Evil One, becomes more than conqueror through the mighty power of the triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.





II.

CAIN AND ABEL.

AFTER the expulsion of our first parents from the Garden of Eden, Eve received comfort by the birth of a son, her first-born. He was called Cain, for his mother exclaimed, 'I have gotten a man from the Lord;' evidently expecting that this child was to be the promised deliverer. The name of Cain, meaning possession, showed forth the joy of the mother, and the right of the child to the inheritance of the first-born. In due time another son was given, and he was called Abel. The name is considered to have a twofold meaning; the primary one signifies weakness, or vanity; and it can be also rendered to signify grief, or lamentation. Both interpretations are justified by the Scripture

narrative. Ancient writers abound in observations on the mystical character of Abel. He is spoken of as the representative of the pastoral tribes. St. Chrysostom calls him the Lamb of Christ. St. Augustine speaks of him as representing the new, or spiritual man, and says he was the first-fruits of the Church, and was sacrificed in testimony of the future Mediator. Irenæus says that God, in the case of Abel, subjected the just for the unjust, that the righteousness of Abel might be manifested by what he suffered; and that, in the early Church, Abel was considered the first of the martyrs.

Let us now turn and look at the type of the first-born of the human race. Truly it is a melancholy one; for Cain appears to our eyes as a self-willed and sullen man, whose pride of heart was so great, that he would not humble himself to obey God's commands, nor patiently seek to obtain the approval of God, which the holiness of his Creator demanded. He despised to bring to his Maker a sacrifice

as the ground of acceptability. He chose his own way of approach to God, and, being a tiller of the ground, he offered the first-fruits of the field, thereby treating God simply as his superior.

Is not Cain the true reflection of the unconverted heart, which continually rebels against the mode appointed by God for salvation? The atonement, and the very word 'conversion,' are stumbling-blocks to the unsanctified mind. Men desire to be saved; but, like Cain, they must make their own terms, and offer their own fruits, bringing unto a just God their forms, their ceremonies, and their moral perfections. Their self-righteousness prevents them feeling the need of the cleansing blood of the Saviour.

Abel, however, brought the firstlings of the flock; and, having obeyed God in bringing a sacrifice, it was accepted. Here was the first lesson taught, that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. Had Cain possessed the willing mind, he would

have brought an offering which he knew would be well-pleasing to God; but his sullen spirit would not render that obedience which alone could make a sacrifice acceptable; therefore, seeing his brother's offering accepted in preference to his own, hatred at once filled his heart, more especially as Abel, being the younger, Cain had been taught to consider his brother's place much inferior. The position of the first-born among the human race has been always thought much of; and yet we notice in the Holy Scriptures how frequently the elder has had to serve the younger, God not finding in the heart of the first-born that which was well-pleasing in His sight.

So, again, how often does the eldest son prove to be the least blessing in the family! May not it be owing to the fact that, if the first-born be a son, the household delights to honour the child, as being the heir and representative of his father? Instead of the child's first lessons being obedience and humility,

everything is done to cultivate the spirit of Cain; and the parents, in their wilful darkness, help to develop those sins which, in a few years, will bring to them, to their child, and to the world, so much misery.

As soon as Cain permitted jealousy to enter his heart, with what quick succession followed hatred, murder, and lying! And is not it always so, that, in committing the first sin, how many more are brought to birth?

When the Lord asks Cain where his brother Abel is, Cain tries to cover his sin by a lie, and exclaims, 'I know not; am I my brother's keeper?' Thus Cain ignorantly portrayed one of the grandest truths that our Divine Master came into the world to teach. If, ever since the first-born of the human race, the spirit of those words had influenced the progeny of Adam, what a different world should we now behold! Just picture, for one moment, each individual intent on being his brother's keeper! No act that would injure another would be ever committed. No

thought of self-aggrandisement; but each one anxious to put forth another's claim in place of his own. In truth, it would be the Lord's will being daily performed.

Thus we see, in those early days, a distant glimpse of the Gospel; Abel's sacrifice being the type of the Holy Sacrifice of our Saviour for us sinners; and the moral truths of the Gospel gleaming forth, as Cain, in self-defence, roughly asks: 'Am I my brother's keeper?'

III.

NOAH.

Not two thousand years had passed since God had said that the work of Creation was very good; and now, when God beheld the wickedness of the human race, He repented that He had created man. God, therefore, determined to destroy man from the face of the earth. Out of all the people then living, God could find only one just and upright man. That man was Noah, and he found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Does not this show to what depths of depravity mankind had fallen since the Creation, that there should have been then found only one man ready to obey God's commands? In all God's acts to the children of men, we are always having proofs of God's patience and long-suffering.

Noah was engaged about one hundred

years in preparing the ark, and at the same time preaching to and warning the children of men to turn from their wickedness. Yet during that long period not one soul was convinced of his danger. Such being the case, the people would naturally scoff and laugh when they beheld Noah preparing the ark. As it was then, so it is now; for the wise in their own eyes despise the simplicity of the Gospel, and desire to be saved only by a salvation of their own making. Had the unbelieving hearts of the antediluvians surrendered to the will of God, the door of the ark would have stood as wide open to any who believed as to Noah; for the same faith that in after days delivered the Israelites, by looking at the brazen serpent, was the same faith that then would have delivered every soul from the just punishment of God. When the door of the ark was shut, and the righteous anger of God was overtaking them, the people, no doubt, would have then gladly entered the ark. But the hour to exercise

obedience, faith, and trust was passed. Could they then have found any entrance into the ark, it would have been to save their bodies from those destructive waters, and would not have been the righteous obedience shown by Noah, who obeyed God and built the ark; who trusted in God and entered the ark; and who, when the door was shut, waited in faith those one hundred and fifty days until the waters should subside.

Have we ever pictured Noah watching those fearful floods—not knowing how long the waters would prevail—looking out of the window of the ark, and gradually losing sight of man and beast—seeing the agony of many a soul whilst struggling with those mighty waves—beholding the tops of the foliage on the sides of the hills vanishing from his sight, so that no bird of the air could find a rest for its weary wings—then the high hills, one by one, effaced by the covering of the waters, until at last not the very highest point of a mountain was left in view?

In looking from his window after the space of forty days, whether Noah turned to the north or to the south, to the east or to the west, there was nothing but those angry waters to behold. Must not Noah have realized in some degree God's terrible hatred to sin, in thus sweeping from that part of the earth everything that was instinct with life? Do not you think that during all those days in which Noah was shut up in the ark, he was oftentimes tried by the want of faith in his sons and their wives? For, when those waters were tossing their little home about, many a fear and troubled doubt must have passed through their minds, lest they also should find a watery grave. These sons and their wives were evidently saved for Noah's sake, as we do not read of their faith, but only of the faith of Noah. They may, however, have possessed a faith such as we behold in a weak saint of the present day, who will not fully accept the sweet promises that bring so much peace to the believing soul.

In surveying the acts of the Bible saints we seem to take their faith as the natural outcome of the age in which they lived, and of the circumstances by which they were surrounded; and yet the faith of to-day is still the same faith which God demanded at the beginning. The Divine laws may be clothed in another garb, but their essence is still the same. We are too often ready to excuse ourselves by thinking that our individual faith is an exceptional exercise to that of another; at the same time forgetting that our loving Father gives to every one of his children that which will best fit them to become branches of the true Vine.

We need not ask what were Noah's feelings when he again returned to the earth, for the sacred Word tells us that his first act was that of thanksgiving. His own life, and the lives of his loved ones, had been spared; therefore, with a grateful heart, he sacrificed unto the Lord; and the Lord was so well-pleased with the offering that He gave to

Noah and his offspring a blessing, that shall last while time remains. Yes! it was then that God promised that never more by a flood should the earth be destroyed. The rains may descend, the floods may come, the sluice-gates of the earth may burst; but God's promise remains immovable. Too well the Lord knew the doubting heart of the creature that He had created; therefore, in His condescending love, He made a covenant with Noah, declaring that while the earth remaineth seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease. As the token of that covenant the Lord set the beautiful bow in the cloud, that in beholding it we should remember the lovingkindness of our God—the unchangeable God, whom in our mind we do sometimes doubt, although to this day we behold fulfilled before our eyes the covenant-promise made to Noah. And is there anything in the visible creation that can make us feel so much the presence of

our Heavenly Father as that glorious arch throwing its rays of light so beautifully on our earth, and by its touch brightening each dark spot, even as all those who love God brighten this earthly life in their onward course?



ABRAHAM.

THE original name of Abraham was Abram, and he is first spoken of in Scripture as one of the sons of Terah. The name by which he is now known was given to him by God to signify that he should be a father of a multitude of nations. Abraham was the founder of the Hebrew nation. He was born at Ur, in Chaldea, and was probably the youngest son of Terah, by a second wife. Abraham's wife Sarah was the daughter of Haran, one of his brothers. We know very little of the history of Abraham before he was sixty years old. At that time we find him leaving Ur with his wife, his aged father Terah, and his nephew Lot. We learn, however, from the New Testament that by the

Divine command Abraham left his native land, and dwelt for fifteen years in the land of Charran. There his father Terah died. Being now free from his filial duties, Abraham received a second call to leave his country and kindred, to go unto a land which the Lord would show him. When thus called to go unto a place which he should afterwards receive for an inheritance, Abraham by faith obeyed, and went out, not knowing whither he went.

Though Abraham had been brought up to the pastoral life, it was very different to the life he had afterwards to adopt. The pastoral families in Mesopotamia dwelt in towns and houses, sending out their flocks and herds, under the care of shepherds; but Abraham had now to follow the habits of the Bedouin tribes by dwelling in tents, and moving from place to place, to find fresh pasturage for his cattle. Abraham's first encampment was among the rich pastures in the vale of Moreh; and here the strong faith of the

noble patriarch was rewarded by God appearing unto him, and promising that his seed should inherit the land by which he was surrounded.

Abraham then continued his journey southward, but hearing that there was a grievous famine in the land, he then went down into Egypt. Fearing, however, that the beauty of his wife Sarah might attract the dusky Egyptians, and that his life would then be in danger, he gave out that she was his sister. Here we see Abraham, whose steps were guided by the commands of God, losing his faith and integrity because he feared for the safety of his own life. What a display of the weakness of humanity! The firm faith which had enabled Abraham to leave his country and kindred was now cast aside, and we behold him, whom we so justly admire, stooping to an act which shows that God was not in all his thoughts. His conduct assumes the appearance of a young, untried Christian, and not of the matured saint who calls

forth our unqualified admiration when we look upon Abraham in his after-life.

Abraham leaves Egypt with his wife and Lot, his nephew, and returns to Bethel, where, on his way down to Egypt, he had built an altar to the Lord. While there a strife arose between the herdsmen of Lot and Abraham. The substance of the uncle, as well as that of the nephew, had so greatly increased that there was not sufficient pasturage for their flocks and herds, so that they could not therefore dwell together. Abraham then, in his loving spirit, said to Lot: 'Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me; if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.' What noble generosity! The elder yielding to the younger!

Lot selected the well-watered plains of

Jordan, and pitched his tent toward Sodom, where the people were exceedingly wicked. Had Lot been seeking the welfare of his soul as earnestly as he was seeking his earthly prosperity, he would not have dwelt with the wicked people of Sodom. It came to pass, while Lot was living there, that the neighbouring kings made war upon the King of Sodom; and Lot, with his possessions, was taken captive. As soon as Abraham hears of Lot's captivity, he goes to his rescue, and brings Lot back with all his people and goods. After this deliverance one would have expected Lot to leave these wicked people; for, in such a rich country, he might have found lands as fertile as those in which he now dwelt. We can only, however, suppose that Lot did not sympathize with the ways of the extremely wicked people of Sodom, although he chose to dwell among them. In like manner, how many Christians live so beneath their privileges that they no longer enjoy the company of God's children, but find

more happiness in following the world as closely as their deadened consciences will allow them. Thus we leave Lot in the land of his choice, and if again we find sorrows and troubles overtaking him, let us try to discern the difference between trials of our own seeking and those which we receive from the loving hand of our Heavenly Father; for, the trials which we call down upon ourselves are very different to those waves of affliction through which the child of God is carried onward to higher and holier aspirations.

One day, as Abraham was seated at the door of his tent, the Lord appeared unto him, and renewed the promise that Abraham's wife, Sarah, should have a son. At the same time the Lord, in His condescending love, revealed to Abraham the judgments that were about to overtake Sodom and Gomorrah. When Abraham heard that Sodom was about to be destroyed, he was greatly moved, being filled, no doubt, with anxiety for the safety of Lot and his family. Therefore Abraham turns at

once to the Lord, and pleads for the safety of Sodom. Ah! who shall tell the comfort and encouragement those supplications have been to the Christian world? Under six different forms was Abraham's prayer presented unto the Lord, and with each renewed application did the Lord grant Abraham's request. But not until Abraham had ceased pleading did the Lord depart from him. Is not our blessed Lord the same yesterday, and to-day? and will not He continually remain the same gracious Lord, who is ever waiting to hear our requests? Had Abraham's faith carried him on, his pleadings might have saved the destruction of those cities.

When we reach the eternal shores, how many blessings shall we behold lost to the ungodly, and even to the Christian, through our not discerning that the Lord delights to give, far beyond all we can ask or think! But Abraham's prayer was not lost, for the Lord sent Lot out of the way of the overthrow of the cities, and so remembered Abra-

ham. Although Lot was saved, yet he lost all his earthly possessions, and spent his last days in a cave, in a mountain, near the city of Zoar. We see in the life of Lot a full-length portraiture of those who know, and yet will not follow on to know, the Lord. Had Lot, like Abraham, built altars, and called on the name of the Lord, he might have been the means of saving those wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah ; but even if not successful, his life would have come down to us as the sweet perfume of a righteous man, who, in the midst of dark surroundings, forgot his own selfish ends in showing forth the goodness of the one true God.

Abraham being now one hundred years old, and Sarah ninety, the Lord fulfilled his promise, and gave them a son. According to the Divine command, they called his name Isaac. When Isaac was grown to man's estate the Lord tried Abraham's heart, to see if he were in all things ready to obey. So the Lord commanded Abraham to take his

beloved son Isaac, his only child, and offer him as a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains in the land of Moriah. Abraham lost no time in promptly obeying the Divine injunction, and therefore rose up early in the morning, and after making the necessary preparations for the sacrifice, he and Isaac went unto the place whither God had directed.

What unqualified obedience appears in Abraham's conduct! We behold no hesitation, no doubtings. It was enough that the Lord had commanded. Abraham at once showed himself ready to do the Lord's bidding. What a life of peace and happiness would every Christian now enjoy if each one possessed the faith of that noble patriarch! But such faith was not obtained without many a hard-fought battle with the adversary. We may feel quite sure that in those three days' journey, which had to be accomplished before Abraham could reach the spot appointed by God for the sacrifice, Satan lost no opportunity in endeavouring to thrust into the mind

of Abraham hard thoughts and sore doubts of the love and rectitude of God in demanding that this child of promise should be sacrificed. Such a noble foe as Abraham would not be easily relinquished by the Evil One, in spite of whose fiery darts Abraham continued in his onward march, and on the third day, lifting up his eyes, he saw the spot afar off. Yes! this journey was nearly ended—a journey that must have appeared so long because of the bitter thoughts that would at times oppress Abraham's soul. How could he help thinking of the time when he should retrace his steps, with no son by his side—bereft of his heir—no more to hear his voice—no son to follow him in the field, or to sit beside him in his tent—having, in fact, by his own hand sacrificed the joy of his heart, and rendering his wife Sarah childless—leaving his home, no doubt, without the courage to tell her of the Divine command; for he felt that her faith might not be equal to the trial. Think what a fiery furnace this must have

been! Yet, what do we hear when Isaac asks his father, 'Where is the lamb for the burnt-offering?' Listen to the gentle reply: 'My son, God will provide a lamb.' There is no anguish displayed, and evidently Isaac knew nothing of his father's intentions respecting him until he arrived at the altar.

Think you not that Abraham must have offered many a prayer during that three days' journey that the Lord would incline the heart of his son Isaac to be a willing sacrifice? For how could Abraham have taken a young man of five and twenty, to bind him, and to lay him on the altar, against his will? We must therefore consider that both the father and the son were equally willing for the sacrifice. Surely, we cannot help exclaiming, great is the mystery of godliness! for how can the carnal mind lift itself up to be able spiritually to discern such heaven-taught faith and obedience? Does not this part of Abraham's life unfold a deeper history than at first appears to the unthinking reader? Is it not typical

of our Heavenly Father giving up His beloved Son, to suffer for a sinful world? Even as Abraham and Isaac were ready to be willing sufferers, so, in like manner, the sacrificial offering of our Saviour was mysteriously blended with God's surrender of His only Son.

Twelve years after the event which has been just described, Sarah died, at the age of one hundred and twenty-seven years, and Abraham buried her in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron. The field and the cave were purchased by Abraham from Ephron, and in the presence of the children of Heth they were made a sure possession to him as a burying-place. This was the only piece of land ever possessed in Canaan by Abraham, although the Lord had promised him that his seed should possess all the land, from the river of Egypt unto the river Euphrates.

Sarah had been dead three years when Abraham sent his servant to Mesopotamia to

obtain among his own kindred a wife for his son, as he could not take a wife for Isaac from the Canaanites, the people among whom he dwelt. The journey proved very successful; for his servant brought back Rebecca, the daughter of Bethuel, who was Abraham's nephew. Abraham lived about thirty-five years after this marriage, and died at the age of one hundred and seventy-five years.

In our perusal of the Holy Scriptures we are continually arrested by the many precepts and examples which are given to us for our daily guidance. Here we observe Abraham sending his servant a long journey to obtain a wife for his son, from a family who knew the living God. No trouble was too much to avoid the evil that must have arisen from a union with the idolatrous people by whom Abraham was surrounded. Yet how many Christian families, in wedding their children, seek quite as anxiously for the riches and honours of the world, as do the most worldly and ungodly of parents! Such unions must

of necessity bring much misery; and if Christian parents were not living much below the mark of their high calling, neither they nor their children would be overcome by such temptations. But the danger in such cases is that the pleasures of the world have blighted the purity of their vision; and the early blossoms, that gave promise of fruit, must have withered under the scathing winds of worldly prosperity; thus manifesting the truth of the words of our Divine Master: 'How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God.'

Thus we end the review of one of the most noble lives of Scripture. We feel almost glad that we cannot pronounce Abraham's character to be perfect. His very failures draw our hearts nearer to him, and we marvel how one born in the midst of Eastern habits and surroundings should be able to reflect such a glorious light. But a moment's thought gives us the key: Abraham was called, 'The friend of God.'



V.

ISAAC.

Isaac, the child of promise, whose name means laughter, became the joy of his mother Sarah in her old age. The character of Isaac appears to have been of a calm and placid nature. His pious habits inclined him to reflection and prayer. He was meditating in the fields at eventide when the servant whom Abraham had sent to Mesopotamia to seek a wife for Isaac was returning with the intended bride. It was no display of piety on the part of Isaac to be thus found meditating, for in those early days communication with relations at a distance was rare; and besides, Isaac could not have had the slightest idea whether the time would be long or short before the servant returned, or even whether the jour-

ney would be a success or the reverse. It would have been impossible for Isaac to be otherwise than anxious about the result of this journey. As a lonely man—having, through death, lost the sympathy of his mother—he must now have had his thoughts continually referring to an event which is, or ought to be, one of the most important to the human race. And a man of Isaac's temperament might have been praying to the Lord to give him that desired blessing at the very moment when, lifting up his eyes, he saw camels approaching.

With what joy must Isaac have stepped forward to welcome the partner of his future life! The Eastern bridegroom must have felt more anxiety about his future bride than people in Northern climes can realize; for it is stated that when Rebekah saw Isaac she took a vail and covered herself, thus hiding all charms of beauty or defects. There was, therefore, no opportunity given to Isaac to read in the outward sweetness the reflection

emanating from the purity of the soul. No! he must take his future wife on trust, and wait to see, when the vail was withdrawn, whether his bride would realize the type of his earnest desires.

When the Holy Spirit calls us to go forth and meet our Bridegroom, we know that no vail can hide our characters from His all-piercing eye; that He sees us when we are far-off; and that in all our wanderings He is ever coming forth to meet us. How few there are who, when told of the heavenly home, imitate at once the example of Rebekah, who, in her eagerness to possess an earthly habitation, was ready immediately to leave father, mother, kindred, and all things, so that she might hasten on to meet her future lord. At length, when Rebekah removed her vail, Isaac beheld her clothed with the same jewels and raiment which he had sent by his servant. Yes; Isaac saw his own jewels made doubly brilliant in the person of his wife; so, in like manner, does our Lord

rejoice to see His bride adorned with jewels that reflect the rays of light and beauty which they have received through His comeliness.

We might have been left in doubt about the future happiness of Isaac; but any such doubt is happily removed by Scripture telling us that Isaac loved Rebekah, and was comforted after his mother's death. What tender, loving sympathy must have existed between mother and son, that Isaac, after the lapse of three years, should still continue mourning for his mother! And not until his loving heart received sympathy from Rebekah was Isaac comforted.

Isaac must have been well acquainted with the promise which the Lord had given to his father Abraham, that his posterity should be multiplied as the stars in heaven; and yet, at the age of nearly sixty years, Isaac found himself childless. Isaac therefore entreated the Lord to fulfil His promise, and the Lord heard and answered him, and gave unto

Rebekah two sons, Esau and Jacob; but before their birth the Lord made known unto Rebekah that the elder should serve the younger.

How many of us act like Isaac, daily expecting to receive God's promised gifts, and yet vainly imagining that our part is simply to wait! at the same time forgetting that God does not force any of His promises upon His children. We are, however, plainly told that 'everyone that asketh receiveth;' and that no 'good thing will the Lord withhold from them that walk uprightly.' Therefore, had Isaac entreated the Lord sooner, he would, no doubt, have been spared the many years of anxious waiting.

As there was a famine in the land, Isaac removed unto Gerar, where Abimelech, the King of the Philistines, reigned. The Lord then appeared unto Isaac, and commanded him not to go down into Egypt, but to continue in Gerar. Here Isaac, for fear of his life, seems to have been tempted to commit

the same sin that his father Abraham committed; for Isaac endeavoured to pass off his wife as his sister—Rebekah being described as a woman fair to look upon. When the King discovered the deception he sent for Isaac, and, after reproving him for his conduct, Abimelech charged his people that whoever should touch Isaac or his wife would be put to death.

Under the protection of Abimelech the possessions of Isaac multiplied so quickly that the Philistines became envious of him. Isaac therefore departed from thence, and pitched his tent in the Valley of Gerar. While there, Isaac's servants dug two wells, for which the herdmen of Gerar strove with the herdmen of Isaac. Isaac's servants then removed further off, and dug a third well, for which the herdmen of Gerar did not strive; and this well Isaac called Rehoboth, for, he said, 'Now the Lord hath made room for us.'

Here we see the gentle spirit of Isaac displayed in yielding quietly well after well, and

moving on till he could possess a well whereby his flocks could be watered without any dispute. Isaac no doubt possessed sufficient power to claim his right, for the wells he yielded to the herdmen of Gerar were wells which had been previously dug by his father Abraham, although afterwards filled in. Abimelech also must have felt that Isaac might prove a powerful opponent, else he would not have visited him in order to obtain a covenant of peace, which covenant was ratified by oath. This happening on the same day that Isaac's servants had found water in a well which they were then digging, caused Isaac to call the place Beersheba, which means 'the well of the oath.'

Isaac's life seems to have been especially free from care and sorrow, if we except that early trial which he was called to pass through. His father left him a rich man, and also procured for him a suitable wife, who was brought to his tent without any exertion on his part, whilst Isaac's son Jacob

had to labour fourteen years to procure the wife of his affections.

We see Isaac living calmly and peaceably among people with whom he had no sympathy, and by the sweetness of his temper never arousing their hostile feelings. Isaac appears to us as a man of sentiment and meditation, whose pastoral days seemed to glide softly away. Even when his son Jacob had deceived him, by obtaining the blessing which in his heart he had desired to give to his son Esau, we still hear no upbraiding word escaping from his lips—merely grief that so little remained to give to his favourite son. Isaac thus displayed a sweet resignation to the Divine Will. It must indeed have been a great grief to such a man as Isaac to be thus deceived by the wife of his bosom and by his younger child. This very act, however, may have brought to his mind that he also had been sinning in endeavouring to give to his elder son that which he knew the Lord intended for the younger;

for Isaac surely could not have forgotten that the Lord had declared that the elder should serve the younger.

The last act recorded of Isaac was the bestowal of his blessing upon his children; and, although he was now a blind and feeble old man, yet he lived many years afterwards. On Jacob's return from Mesopotamia he visited his father at Mamre, where Isaac died at the age of one hundred and eighty years, and was buried by his sons Esau and Jacob.

VI.

ESAU AND JACOB.

Esau and Jacob were twins; yet from their birth they were so dissimilar that no one would have imagined that they sprang from the same parentage. As the boys grew, their natural characters early showed forth the bent of their inclinations. Esau, brave and daring, enjoyed the bold adventures of the chase; but Jacob gives us the impression of a quiet and retiring man, dwelling in his father's tent, and, like him, leading the same pastoral life. Indeed, Jacob seems to have partaken much of the nature of his father Isaac, although possessing less of his refinement, but still with a deeper and more subtle character.

As in individuals, so in parents, it is

frequently seen that their affections are more closely drawn to those children who, by nature, are most unlike themselves. Thus Esau's brave and dauntless life would naturally excite the admiration of his father. On the other hand, the mother's feelings were evidently touched by Jacob's quiet and homely ways. Also, seeing in him the child in whom the promises of God would be fulfilled, her thoughts would the more readily dwell upon Jacob's future than upon the unknown prospects of her firstborn son. Thus a sad and very grievous fault arose in Isaac's household; for the parents had each their favourite child. We need not therefore be surprised to see the injury that is engendered by such conduct. What else but discord and deception can parents expect to reap, when love is not equally distributed to their children? Very little pity can be awarded to parents, when they behold their families suffering from such misguided and selfish feelings.

We all know that the life of a hunter is

very precarious; and that however bold and vigilant he may be, yet times will arise when his sport will prove utterly unproductive. Such an unsuccessful hunt having occurred to Esau, he enters his father's home, faint and exhausted. At the same moment Jacob is about to partake of a fragrant mess of pottage, seeing which, Esau begs Jacob to revive his sinking nature by feeding him with the food which Jacob had just prepared. Under any circumstances, a noble mind would have at once consented. But jealousy and division had already crept into that household; and we find Jacob, before complying with Esau's natural request, bargaining for the possession of his brother's birthright in exchange for his mess of pottage. Esau, feeling himself at the point of death, becomes wilfully indifferent to his higher rights, and at once swears to surrender his birthright to Jacob. We cannot imagine that Jacob would have taken such an advantage of his brother, unless there had been some other influence at

work; and we should be led to think, from the conduct of Rebecca, that she had frequently prompted Jacob to endeavour to obtain his brother's birthright, as Esau had doubtless often shown that he held it with light esteem. Had Esau lived after the Mosaic law was in force, he could not thus have sold his birthright—for by that law even a father could not disinherit his first-born.

At the time of the Patriarchs, the privileges of the first-born were not so strictly defined, though they then inherited all the official rights enjoyed by the father. Thus we see Esau caring so little for a blessing that God had given him, that he is ready to part with it for 'one morsel of meat.' We naturally wonder to see such a bold character as that of Esau possessing so little patience and endurance; but we find St. Paul speaks of Esau as a 'profane person;' and no doubt Esau was a man of strong, unsubdued will, and one whose chiefest desire was the gratification

of his senses. Is not the conduct of Esau daily and deliberately shown by the world, and those by whom we are surrounded, who, despising their spiritual birthright, seek only the perishing morsels of meat, and the sensual pleasures that are so quickly dissolved?

Isaac, thinking he was near his latter end, called Esau, and bade him prepare some savoury meat and bring it to him, in order that he might bless him before he died. Rebecca, having heard Isaac make this request, and fearing that her favourite son might lose the blessing, begged Jacob, against his will, to personate his brother Esau. Rebecca then quickly made ready the desired dish, and arrayed Jacob in Esau's garments. Jacob then appears before his father, and succeeds in receiving the blessing that was intended for Esau. When Esau returns from the chase, and brings his father the savoury meat that he had prepared, he finds the blessing lost, for Jacob, through subtlety, had already obtained the blessing.

The name of Jacob means 'he that supplants;' and well might Esau exclaim that his brother had been rightly named, for he had twice supplanted him, in gaining both the birthright and the blessing. Thus we find that 'Esau hated Jacob, because of the blessing wherewith his father had blessed him.'

Rebecca now, dreading the result of Esau's anger, begged Isaac to send Jacob to Padan-Aram, so that he might obtain a wife from the house of her brother Laban. Isaac readily consented, as he did not wish Jacob to take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Therefore, calling his son Jacob to him, he again blessed him, and despatched him on his journey.

No doubt the deception practised on him by his wife and his son had had a salutary effect in making known to Isaac the weakness and rebellion of his own heart. Knowing that God had promised that the elder should serve the younger, Isaac ought to

have lost no opportunity of showing in his household a ready submission to carry out the promises of God. We can easily imagine that Isaac would not be at all anxious to bring to remembrance the Divine promise, when it would remove the blessing from his favourite son, and thwart his own desires. This misguided love had therefore clouded Isaac's spiritual character, and had thereby lessened his moral strength, so that, with his loving nature, Isaac would have been afraid (even had he wished) to willingly displace Esau by transferring the blessing from the elder to the younger. Esau's nature, however, was of that type that he would not have comprehended the heavenly submission that Isaac ought to have shown by obeying the Divine injunction. Thus we see, when a house is divided against itself, what sorrow it brings to each individual. Had Rebecca waited patiently for the Lord to fulfil His word, she would have spared herself much suffering. But she was sinfully impatient.

In endeavouring to hasten on the event, which God in His own good time would have brought to pass, Rebecca not only sinned, but caused her son Jacob also to sin; and from her posterity sprang the bitterness that was afterwards shown between the tribes of Edom and Israel. Both mother and son had to suffer for their wilful conduct, for we do not trace that Rebecca ever saw her favourite son again, and Jacob also was banished twenty years from his beloved Canaan.

After receiving his father's blessing Jacob left Beersheba and journeyed towards Haran. On his way thither he passed the night at a place called Luz, where he was favoured with a vision from the Lord. Jacob commemorated the spot by erecting and pouring oil upon the stone which had served him for a pillow, and he called the name of the place Beth-el, meaning 'the house of God.' Jacob then continued his journey until he arrived at a well in Padan-Aram. Whilst there, his

cousin Rachel appears with her father's sheep to water them. Jacob having been informed by some herdmen who Rachel was, he at once makes himself known. When Rachel's father Laban hears of the arrival of his sister's son, he runs out to meet him, and brings him to his own house, with all the joyful and warm demonstrations peculiar to the East.

Laban had two daughters; the elder was called Leah and the younger Rachel. Now Jacob loved his cousin Rachel, who was beautiful and well-favoured. Therefore he offered to serve his uncle seven years, so that he might obtain Rachel for his wife. This offer Laban accepted. When the seven years had expired Laban made a feast in honour of the wedding. Instead, however, of giving Jacob his daughter Rachel, Laban deceived him, and gave him for wife his elder daughter, Leah. When Jacob complained of the deception that had been practised upon him, Laban gave him also Rachel, for whom he had to serve seven years more.

After dwelling with his uncle twenty years, the Lord again appeared unto Jacob, and bade him return unto the land of his fathers and kindred. Jacob obeyed, and left Haran, accompanied by his two wives, their handmaids, and his eleven children, and also took with him all the substance he had obtained while living in the land of Syria.

When Jacob drew near to the land of Edom he sent messengers to Esau, and they returned, saying that his brother Esau was coming forth to meet him with four hundred men. Jacob was then greatly afraid, for he knew that he had provoked his brother, and had very good reason to fear his anger. Therefore, with the view of appeasing his brother Esau, Jacob sends his servants in advance with a present of cattle, and then, taking his wives and children, passes over the ford Jabbok.

And now it is night. Jacob is left alone. His brother Esau is close upon him. He, whom he unjustly deprived of his rights, may

in a few short hours take from him all that he holds most dear. What hope has he of deliverance? Whither can he turn for help? In that lone hour Jacob feels there is but ONE from whom alone true succour can arrive. Yes; all night Jacob wrestles for the pardon of all those sins which he now dreads will fall so bitterly on his head. Think you he prevailed? Ah, yes! was it ever known that a fervent prayer was lost? What a night of wrestling! But we behold him coming forth like a soldier from the battle-field, bringing his marks with him. See! this warfare has left him in his walk physically halting; but spiritually he has become a new man. Old things have passed away, and he is now no longer to be called Jacob, the supplanter, but Israel, a prince of God.

Jacob called the name of that place Peniel, for, he said, 'I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.'

How sweet that name must have sounded when God called him Israel! No time in

after-life could ever efface from Jacob's mind that long night of earnest prayer. Did Jacob gain this blessing simply for himself, or was it not intended to teach every sinner that without wrestling and earnest pleading no victory will be won over sin and self? Even as Jacob prevailed, so shall every child of God bring heavenly showers of spiritual blessings from above.

In the morning Jacob went forth to meet his brother Esau; but, after such a night of prayer, what a change must have passed over Jacob! He sees his brother Esau approaching with four hundred men. But what of that? for Jacob now carries a peace in his soul that nothing can assail. Yes; he uses all necessary precautions in taking care of his family, and then he calmly passes before them, and advances to meet his brother, bowing humbly to the ground until he comes near to Esau.

How does this brave, daring man receive his brother Jacob? Have the bitter wounds

that were caused by his brother festered or healed? Look, and let his conduct give the reply. See! Esau runs to meet Jacob, embraces him, falls on his neck, kisses him, and the brothers weep. Noble Esau! so ready to forgive! so generous withal! the very present which Jacob had sent he wishes to decline. It was such a free forgiveness; not a vestige of bitter remembrance remained. How often do such natures, which lack only the one thing needful, shame those who are *inwardly* rejoicing in spiritual gifts! And such characters even command general admiration. They feel their own strength, yet they are unwilling to yield to a higher rule; while weaker and less attractive natures recognise the want of a strengthening power from on high.

After this interview Esau returned to Seir, and Jacob continued his journey towards Beth-el, where he had made an altar unto God when he fled from his brother Esau. Here Deborah, Rebecca's nurse, died, and

was buried under an oak, which was called Allon-bachuth, or 'the oak of weeping.'

After departing from Beth-el, and while they were yet only a little way from Ephrath, Rachel, the favourite wife of Jacob, was taken ill and died, leaving Jacob a little son, whom he called Benjamin. Jacob set up a pillar over Rachel's grave, which is seen by travellers to this day.

At last Jacob reaches his father's house at Mamre in Hebron. Isaac no doubt was too blind to behold his twelve grandchildren, but the joy of his heart must have been very great, when he saw already a portion of his blessing fulfilled.

We will now leave Jacob in the promised land, and when we pursue the history of his sons, we shall catch many glimpses of the old patriarch, whose life was a very varied and checkered one. As Jacob advances in age we learn to perceive the beneficial effects of such a life upon a nature like his. The Refiner was busy doing His work, and in the

crucible of varied trials the dross from Jacob's character was being burnt away, and the pure metal was beginning to appear.

Thus we see in the life of Jacob the words of the Apostle verified, viz.: 'No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous . . . nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness.'



VII.

JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN.

JOSEPH'S brethren had gone to feed their father's flock at Shechem, and Israel being anxious to know whether his sons and the flock were well, sent Joseph, his favourite son, a lad of seventeen years of age, to seek after them, and to bring him word. Now the brothers hated Joseph, and could not speak well of him. Their hatred had been recently greatly increased, owing to two remarkable dreams which Joseph had, and from which they could draw no other interpretation than that he should one day rule over them.

When Joseph arrived at Dothan, to which place his brothers had removed from

Shechem, they saw him approaching, and said to one another, 'Behold this dreamer cometh; now let us slay him, and we will say, "Some evil beast hath devoured him!"' Reuben, however, his eldest brother, was opposed to this, and said, 'Let us not kill him, but cast him into this pit,' thinking, no doubt, that he could afterwards deliver him safely to his father.

In the meantime some trading Midianites were seen passing by on their way to Egypt, and the brothers agreed to sell Joseph to them for twenty pieces of silver. They therefore drew Joseph from the pit, and delivered him to these merchants, who took him with them into Egypt, and there sold him to Potiphar, an officer belonging to Pharaoh's guard. When Reuben, who was absent during these negotiations, returned to the pit, he found his brother Joseph had been taken away, and he was distressed beyond measure. But the other brothers at that moment were feeling only too glad, for they

had been thus far successful in removing from their sight one whose presence called forth their most wicked and worst passions, and they showed themselves utterly indifferent to the pain and sorrow they would cause their father when he should hear of the loss of his favourite child. No! they had given full rein to their worst passions, and manifested by their conduct how true are the words of the inspired King when he wrote that 'jealousy is cruel as the grave.'

We can easily imagine the unhappy position in which Joseph's brethren had placed themselves through their deceptive acts. They saw continually the grief of their father at the loss of his son Joseph, yet their hardened natures were not for one moment softened. Even when their father refused to be comforted, their stubborn natures would not allow them to exclaim, 'Joseph lives!' They must have known that those words would have sent a sweet glimmering of hope into the soul of the old patriarch, and would have

prevented the years of sorrow which their callous hearts coldly beheld.

Following the steps of Joseph, we see him appearing in the house of Potiphar, performing his work with exemplary rectitude, the Lord making everything prosper in his hands, until, the wife of Potiphar falsely accusing him, he is thrown into prison. But even in prison the Lord did not forsake Joseph; for the Lord gave him favour in the eyes of the keeper of the prison, who committed unto Joseph the care of the prisoners.

It so happened that two officers in Pharaoh's household, the chief butler and the chief baker, having offended the King, they were placed in ward under the care of Joseph. One morning, when entering the ward where these two men were confined, Joseph, with that quick sympathy which belongs only to higher natures, perceived the sadness of their faces, and, on inquiring the cause, was informed that on the previous night they had each had

a dream, and were consequently unhappy because there was no interpreter. Joseph then requested to hear their dreams, at the same time telling them that interpretations belong to God. On being told the butler's dream, Joseph informed him that he would be restored to his former place in three days' time, and begged the butler, when standing again in the presence of Pharaoh, to make mention of him to the King, so that he might be released from prison.

We follow the chief butler out of the prison into the palace, and listen to hear him plead with Pharaoh for the release of Joseph; but we listen in vain! and we are told that the butler forgot Joseph. Yes, the butler was very ungrateful. But is not his conduct continually being rehearsed? There is no sin so common as ingratitude; and human nature resents no accusation so quickly as when charged with this vice.

The chief butler has enjoyed his freedom for two whole years, yet Joseph is still in

bondage; but the time is drawing near when he will again be a free man.

Pharaoh having had a dream which none of the wise men of Egypt could interpret, the chief butler at last remembered Joseph, and informed Pharaoh of the young Hebrew servant that he had left in the prison, and who possessed the power of interpreting dreams. The king therefore commanded Joseph to be sent for, and communicated to him his dream, which Joseph by Divine power was enabled to interpret, displaying at the same time such wisdom in his advice and forethought that the king thereupon appointed him as ruler over all the land of Egypt.

It would be impossible to show a greater contrast in the career of an individual. Only a few short hours have passed since we beheld Joseph a slave and in prison, and clothed with a prisoner's garb. What position could be more mean and ignoble? Those days of prison life and slavery must necessarily have brought much suffering. Neither had they

been few, for nearly half of Joseph's life had been spent in Egypt. Yet it was those very days and years of discipline that enabled Joseph to go forth from such a habitation to enter the palace of a king, and to receive the honour and distinction that awaited him.

Yes; Joseph was to be the ruler of that mighty Egypt; to be second in power to a Pharaoh; and all the homage of an Eastern country was to be rendered to the exiled Joseph. How often would he have to dwell in thought on those past days of slavery and scorn to help him to be the truly humble Joseph, and to act the wise and discreet man. And yet it was those very days that fitted him for such an elevation. For had not he known the weight of the prisoner's chain, and felt the manacles of a slave? Therefore, should the pride of his heart be unduly stirred, one thought of his past position would keep him humble to the oppressed, and make him the ever-ready helper to the

many afflicted ones that surrounded him in those days of fearful want and famine.

Thus we see that through much waiting and suffering Joseph was prepared for his high position. As the mighty oak is strengthened by the midnight storms, so will every Christian character be made stronger and holier through the discipline and suffering of this present life: for the waiting work of to-day is only the preparatory step in fitting the soul to occupy its heavenly home.

As the inhabitants of Canaan were suffering from a famine, Jacob sent his sons down into Egypt to buy corn, but he would not let Benjamin, his youngest son, accompany them, lest any accident should befall him. When they arrived in Egypt they presented themselves to Joseph, who, as governor, had the selling of the corn to all the people round about. Joseph at once recognised his brothers, but they did not recognise him; and seeing them bowing their faces before him to the ground, he remembered the dream of his

early days, which he thus saw fulfilled. The brothers informed Joseph of their business, and that they were come to Egypt to buy food. Joseph, however, disputed with them, spoke roughly to them, and even accused them of being spies. Desirous, however, of vindicating themselves, and of proving that their only object in visiting Egypt was to buy corn, they informed Joseph who they were, and that their youngest brother had been left at home. On hearing this Joseph declared that the only way to prove they were not spies was for them to return to Canaan and bring back their youngest brother. Joseph, nevertheless, treated them as spies, and put them all in prison together, and kept them there for three days.

We cannot read this part of Joseph's life without being struck with the extraordinary wisdom which he displayed. Had he revealed himself at once to his brethren he could not have taught them the salutary lesson which they must have learnt during those three

days of imprisonment. With a show of leniency, Joseph caused them to be put together in one ward. If they had been innocent such consideration would have been a great comfort to them, but the presence of each other would now only increase their distress; for they were all burdened with the same guilt, and therefore could not bring consolation to one another. Only one feeling could possess their minds, and that was that their brother's blood was now required at their hands. When they entered those prison walls they knew not when they should be again free. It might be months; it might be years; it might be (oh, what anguish in the thought!) that they, like their brother Joseph, should no more return to Canaan, and even perhaps no more behold their wives, and their little ones, and the father whom they had so cruelly deceived. Yes; Joseph wrought in their minds a lesson never to be forgotten. He thus awoke their slumbering consciences, and brought vividly to light the

heinousness of their sins. Never, ah! never in after-life could they forget those three long, long days of bitter—ay, bitter misery. At the expiration, however, of the three days Joseph sent them back with corn to Canaan, but retained Simeon in prison as a surety until they returned with their brother Benjamin.

When the sons of Israel arrived home they informed their father that the governor of Egypt had looked upon them as spies, and had therefore detained Simeon until they should go back again and take Benjamin with them, to prove the truth of their words. Having lost his son Joseph, and Simeon being left behind as a prisoner, the old patriarch, with his deep parental feelings, naturally felt great fear in letting his youngest son go down into Egypt. So he refused at first to let him go, declaring that if anything befell his Benjamin they would bring down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Finding, however, that his other offspring would suffer

for want of their daily bread, he at last consented, on condition that Judah should be responsible for Benjamin's safe return.

When the brothers again arrive in Egypt, Joseph causes Simeon to be removed from prison, and then hospitably entertains them all. Although his heart is yearning towards them, yet he wisely refrains, as he wishes to see how far they would protect their brother Benjamin from the trouble that he was now about to throw around him. Therefore, in sending them back again to Canaan with a further supply of corn, Joseph had ordered his steward to put his silver cup into Benjamin's sack. Then, after they had proceeded a little way on their journey, the steward follows them, and overtakes them, and accuses them of stealing the silver cup. Quickly their sacks are all searched, and the cup is discovered in the sack of Benjamin. In the greatest agony of mind they are all brought back into the presence of Joseph, and falling on the ground before him, Judah exclaims:

'What shall we say unto my lord? What shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants.' Thus we see how their consciences were condemning them. They knew they were innocent regarding the silver cup, but they began to be afraid that God was now about to uncover their past iniquity.

At length Judah relates to Joseph how he has made himself responsible to his father for the reappearance of Benjamin, and requests Joseph to take him as his slave, if only the lad may return in safety.

Seeing how willing Judah was to suffer in the place of Benjamin, Joseph now felt he could no longer restrain his pent-up feelings. He therefore made himself known to his brethren. But such a revelation naturally produced fear in their hearts, lest their brother should punish them for their past guilt. When Joseph saw them troubled in his presence, and not able to answer him, he forgot all his past sufferings in the desire of soothing their

consciences, and making them feel his full forgiveness. What can be more noble and loving than the manner in which he again addresses them? 'Come near to me, I pray you,' he says; 'I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. . . . Be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life.' And in other loving words Joseph made his brethren to understand how that through his sufferings he had been made the instrument of serving them. With these explanations, Joseph then fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and also embraced and kissed all his other brethren.

After this recognition Joseph felt anxious that his brethren should return quickly back to Canaan to inform his father that he was still alive, and to bring him back with them, and all their households, so that Joseph might sustain them during the coming years of famine.

What true humility was manifested in

Joseph's conduct with regard to the treatment of his family! We must remember that Joseph was now a ruler in Egypt; that he was a great man; that his wife was a princess; and that he had been for many years accustomed to the pomp, fashion, and grandeur of an Eastern court. As a public man all his acts were observed, and however prudent might be his conduct, he must, as an alien and foreigner, have had many enemies, and not a few would be found who would despise his origin and yet envy his position. In the midst of all this splendour ten shepherds, whose occupation was an abomination to the Egyptians, arrive in Egypt to buy corn. In their pastoral garb and manner, they must have looked very uncourtly as they bowed in homage before this mighty man. Was he ashamed of them? Did he disown them? No! we see that his loving nature yearned over them, and that he was obliged to retire in secret, 'to weep his bosom empty.'

When his father arrived in Egypt Joseph presented him to Pharaoh, and five of his brethren he also brought before the King. How different in this respect is the conduct of Joseph to what we witness in some men of the present time, who, when prosperity attends them, often forget and ignore their nearest and closest ties! By them the example of Joseph is unheeded, for in the midst of all his earthly grandeur he never for one moment forgets the ties of kindred and blood.

Jacob dwelt for seventeen years in Egypt; and we can easily imagine that they were the most peaceful and happy years of his eventful life. Surrounded as he was with plenty—blessed with the presence of all his children—daily beholding the power and position held by his favourite son—and prophetically realizing that his numerous progeny should ultimately inherit the land of Canaan—the last days of his earthly career flowed gently onward like some grand river that at length reaches its natural destination. Thus Jacob's

spirit passed away to its heavenly Canaan, the true inheritance of all the Israel of God.

After the death of their father Joseph's brethren sent him a message, praying that he would forgive them all the evil that they had done unto him. When Joseph heard the pleadings of his brethren he wept to think that their fear and distrust should thus continue; for he wanted them to understand his full forgiveness, and to rest in his love. In like manner our Divine Master desires us to trust in His love, and accept unwaveringly His sweet promises, resting assured that our full acceptance of His Divine Word is more pleasing to Him than any unworthy doubts of ourselves that may appear humble in our own eyes.

Joseph was one hundred and ten years old when he died. Before his death, however, he had made his brethren promise that when they left Egypt they should carry his remains with them to the Promised Land. He also told them that God would surely visit them,

and bring them out unto the land which He sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Thus the true Israelites, in the days of their bondage, would find spiritual consolation in remembering the promise given to the Patriarchs, that they should one day possess the Land of Canaan.



VIII.

MOSES.

In course of time the children of Israel grew so mighty, and increased so fast, that the Egyptians became alarmed when they beheld them spreading throughout the land. The King of Egypt therefore determined to diminish their numbers. To accomplish this purpose he gave orders to the Hebrew nurses to destroy at their birth all the male children belonging to the Hebrew mothers.

When power falls into the hands of an evil man, he will not stop at anything that thwarts his desires. All things must succumb to his will. He admits of no law of right or moral rectitude, and the suffering of another is below his consideration. Everything that militates against his absolute will must be

overthrown. In this manner did Pharaoh act towards the children of Israel. He could not crush, so he determined to destroy. Therefore we shall behold him reaping the same consequences that follow all men who admit of no will but their own. One sure result follows the acts of such men; that is, the destruction of their happiness, and the ultimate loss of everything that is pure and noble. Having defied the laws of conscience, they are at last overtaken by the law of compensation; and by continually rendering evil to others, they are at length entangled in their own meshes.

One Hebrew mother, however, by faith in the God of Israel, was not afraid of the King's command. Having preserved her child for three months, and not being able to hide him any longer, this mother made a cradle of bulrushes, and laid her child therein, and placed the cradle on the banks of the river Nile. What must have been the feelings of that fond mother when she put the

ark of bulrushes on the brink of that mighty river! Who can fathom the depth of anguish that swelled in that parental bosom? What hours of thought must not she have spent in devising the best method to save her lovely boy! Was there no other hope than to place the ark upon the brink of those advancing waters? Again and again would that Hebrew mother follow in thought that fragile bark until a brighter hope illuminated her mind. We fancy we hear her say, 'There is the brink of the river lined with flags. There my baby's bark will be stationary, and the gentle undulations of the waters will prolong his sweet slumbers, so that my infant boy will not so soon miss the soft cradling of his mother's arms. True! in the midst of all this rank vegetation many a fierce crocodile will glide past that floating habitation; but bulrushes will be nothing strange or attractive to that scaly tribe. Besides, am not I one of the chosen race, and though we are now for our sins and idolatry in bondage and

suffering, still our God has promised to bring us into the land of Canaan; and has not my little one been preserved for three months from the eyes of our enemies? Thus hast Thou, O Mighty One of Israel, increased my faith, and I will now leave my darling babe in Thy protecting arms, and trust that the God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, will be his deliverer.' By some such thoughts as these cannot we imagine the Hebrew mother was guided and supported thus to act, and to become an instrument in the hands of God to deliver Israel from their cruel persecutors?

We are quite sure the Hebrew mother trusted in the living God, but we must remember she used every means for the safety of her child. She therefore set her daughter Miriam to watch what might occur. Whilst Miriam was thus watching, the daughter of Pharaoh, attended by her maids, came down to the river to bathe. The Princess espies the ark among the flags, and sends one of

her maids to fetch it. When the ark is opened the babe begins to weep, the sight of which stirs the compassionate heart of the Princess. Miriam, seeing this, steps forward, and asks whether she should fetch one of the Hebrew women to nurse the child; and the Princess commands her to do so. Miriam of course brings her mother. So mother and nurse, unknowingly to the Princess, are blended in one.

What a lesson to that Israelitish family! One would imagine that it was with a very trembling faith that that precious burthen was committed to the waters of the Nile, but that little faith was now rewarded a thousand-fold. Only a few short hours had elapsed before we see the babe again reposing on its mother's bosom, unconscious of the many perils that had surrounded its little life. Now, the first lispings of this child will be in its mother tongue. He will be taught how Abraham trusted in the living God; how Isaac was blessed; and how Israel had de-

clared that his posterity should dwell in the land of Canaan. Thus imbued with the history of his forefathers, he will love his nation, and as he grows up will be ready to resent the cruelty of the Egyptians. Here we see the influence of the mother's teaching, and what a glorious harvest it produced.

When Moses was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit the children of Israel; and seeing one day an Egyptian smiting an Israelite, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand. The next day he beheld two Israelites striving together; and he would have made peace between them, but they indignantly inquired if he were going to serve them as he did the Egyptian. Moses thus finding that his conduct to the Egyptian was known, fled from the power of Pharaoh into the land of Midian.

The noble nature of Moses becomes aroused by his deep sympathy with his brethren, and he flings aside the luxury of a palace and the power of royalty, and with

true greatness endeavours to render justice to the oppressed, though he himself becomes the sufferer. He who would elevate a community, whether large or small, even a nation or an empire, must expect to be misunderstood. His ways, acts, and motives will, of necessity, be beyond the comprehension of the many, and not a few will be jealous in finding their leader ever first in the advanced guard.

No one can read the life of Moses, even before he becomes the deliverer of his people, without being struck with the peculiar circumstances of his life. As a babe he was miraculously spared; and had not those early dangers surrounded him, he would not in all probability have been fitted to carry out the arduous task for which he was appointed.

God is never in haste with any of His works. If we look abroad in the visible creation, we can see a preparation in all things; and that which we often term forethought is what we may continually behold

in the mighty universe. Look, for instance, at that sturdy oak. How many countless ages had disappeared before the earth was fitted to receive the acorn. And then how many a seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, day and night, dewy eve and stormy morn, must have passed away before the young birds could nestle in those branches, or the weary traveller find shelter from the summer heat. So with Moses. He was destined to fulfil a work, the grandeur, weight, and responsibility of which we cannot now justly estimate; a work that required the man to be well prepared through the varied circumstances of life for such an undertaking. And when we look at Moses we see just the man. A Hebrew by birth, and knowing all the Israelitish habits and peculiarities; bred in a palace, and surrounded by the advantages of an Egyptian Court, he then becomes a shepherd, and tends his flock upon a lone and solitary mountain. There, in the quietude of that desert place, thinking

of his afflicted brethren, he doubtless sent forth many an earnest petition for their deliverance. At length, after all his varied training, he is brought into visible communion with God, to receive those commands which will enable him to act and appear as the servant of the Most High. Thus, after many years of preparation, do we see Moses come forth a truly humble, patient, and intelligent man, ready to do God's bidding. So will it ever be with all things, whether they belong to the material, moral, or spiritual world, while passing from a lower to a higher state. They must always undergo much change, frequent suffering, and a preparation from which finite man often shrinks. Such a preparation, however, will alone fit man to carry out God's purpose.

We have seen Moses very ready to protect his suffering brethren; but when God appeared to him at Mount Horeb, and called him to the work of delivering the children of Israel, he raised many objections. He said

the people would not believe the Lord had sent him, nor that the Lord had appeared unto him. He also referred to his difficulty of speech, and said, 'Since Thou hast spoken to Thy servant, I am as slow of speech as heretofore.' What a salutary lesson we all might learn from this view of Moses; for he appeared to expect that the Lord would give him work to do, and that that work would be free from difficulties. He also thought that God would remove his deficiencies of speech, and give him eloquence of language. Moses did not want to travel through the rough and rugged road of scorn, contempt, and disbelief; nor to stand alone and declare to his own nation that the Lord had appeared unto him; for he felt that many an envious heart would be ready to disbelieve that he was divinely called.

There he was; a man of no worldly power; possessing no persuasive speech; slow in uttering the deep thoughts of his mind; all which made him feel keenly the difficulties of

the work he had to overcome. But where was his trust? For even after the Lord had promised to teach him what to say, still Moses was not content. He was not satisfied to lean upon God alone, and therefore God, in His great love, gave him Aaron to be his spokesman. Would not Moses, in after years, whilst journeying through the wilderness, oft-times remember God's great condescension and his own faithlessness in this season of discipline? And would not God's tender forbearance towards Moses enable him, in like manner, to bear with the unbelieving Israelites? But how much more pleasing a picture it would have been, could we have seen Moses go forth at once, in full trust and confidence in God, relying solely on the promise that God would be his teacher and guide.



IX.

MOSES AND AARON BEFORE THE COURT OF PHARAOH.

ACCORDING to the Divine command, Aaron left Egypt to join his brother Moses, and they met at Mount Horeb. After embracing each other, Moses relates to Aaron all the commands he has received from God, and shows his brother what they are to perform before the children of Israel, to convince them that Moses has been appointed by God for their deliverance. Thus Moses, after spending forty years in the land of Midian, again revisits Egypt, accompanied by his brother Aaron.

On their arrival they immediately call the elders of Israel together, and rehearse all that

the Lord had spoken to Moses, showing forth the signs in the sight of the people, on seeing which the people believed that the Lord was about to deliver them from their cruel bondage.

Moses and Aaron then went and appeared before Pharaoh, and asked him, in the name of the God of Israel, to let the Hebrew children go into the wilderness, to hold a feast unto the Lord. Pharaoh, however, replied, 'I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.' How many there are who, though they would not dare to utter the words of Pharaoh, yet by their acts and lives prove that they know not the Lord, neither will they be subject to Him. Following their own devices, and boasting of their freedom, they ignorantly descend to a greater bondage than that of the meanest slave. The bondage of the slave may be only the bondage of the body, but he who will not submit to the King of Kings, must of necessity be ruled and chained by the powers of darkness.

Moses was not willing to accept the noble work to which God had called him, until the Lord had promised him that his brother Aaron should be his spokesman. One need not wonder that Moses manifested this strong repugnance to appear in the presence of Pharaoh to plead for his suffering brethren, although this was not the Pharaoh that had sought his life. It might not be so much a dislike to encounter Pharaoh, as the painfulness of addressing a heathen and a hard-hearted man, and one who knew nothing of the mighty God of Israel.

We can scarcely imagine any position more painful than that of Moses at the present time. His very request to Pharaoh, for the deliverance of his brethren, had been the means of increasing their sufferings; and, in the anguish of their spirit, they would not hearken unto him. Even his own faith must have been much tried, for we find that when he beheld the taskmasters increasing the sufferings of the Israelites, he addressed the

Lord in a very faithless manner, saying, 'Wherefore hast Thou so evil entreated this people? Why is it that Thou hast sent me?' One can easily suppose that Moses would be anxious that the God of his fathers should be magnified in the sight of the unbelieving Egyptians; more especially so, when Pharaoh asks, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice?' Still, the very thought of the omnipotent power that would be soon displayed if the king did not submit, would bring much mental anguish to one so refined and sensitive as Moses. Doubtless this feeling would be also increased by the fact that there must have been many surrounding the Court of Pharaoh who had been well acquainted with Moses in his early days, and who would look with coldness and distrust on one who was bringing nothing but misery to their hearths.

Here we see Moses undergoing that discipline in patience which was so eminently displayed by him in after days; and we thus

learn that we cannot obtain, in a short time, excellency in any virtue. It is not the few bright mornings in spring that give to nature her youthful loveliness. Many a chill and cold and cutting blast has nature received since she was dismantled of her summer beauty; and while she seems softly slumbering beneath her snow-flaked covering, it was no sluggish loitering, but the patient fulfilling of her appointed time; and when she again steps forth, arrayed in her pristine glory, and puts forth her strength and beauty with such apparent rapidity, then she displays the full fruition of that long preparation and patient waiting. In like manner must it ever be with all who use every opportunity to develop those talents that are committed to their care. Earnestly and patiently must they strive to be fitted for the work that will in time present itself; but, should the seed-time be lost, no after season can bring forth the desired fruit. Therefore, if difficulties arise, either in our spiritual, moral, or intellectual pursuits,

we must endeavour to exercise that patience by which alone they can be overthrown, ever remembering that each obstacle thus subdued is the sure means of strengthening our steps in the upward path.

Moses and Aaron appear again and again before Pharaoh, to show forth the mighty power of Israel's God. Yet the heart of Pharaoh is unmoved. While suffering under the visitation of God, he apparently repents; but, as soon as the trial is removed, his heart is again hardened. This is a fit type of the ungodly man, who, in the hour of trial, turns with seeming repentance; but, when the affliction is averted, it is discovered that the last state of such a man is worse than the first.

Though the children of Israel were God's own favoured people, still God was ready to save and bless the Egyptians when they obeyed His commands. We notice this particularly during the seventh plague. When God was about to rain down a very grievous hail, such as had never been seen in Egypt

since the foundation thereof, those Egyptians who feared the Lord and heeded His warning made their servants and cattle flee into the houses, and were all saved.

And again, who can think of that ninth plague, when God visited the Egyptians with those three terrible days of darkness, without feeling thankful that we are the hearers and not the receivers of such a judgment? We ought to try to bring before our minds, as vividly as possible, all the unbelieving Egyptians sitting in that fearful darkness—a darkness so thick that it could be felt—and where no artificial light could overpower the heaviness of such an atmosphere. Besides, we are told they were not able to rise from their places for three days. Think of the little ones trying to find the lap of their mother!—the fond sick one tossing on the bed of pain, and no one able to administer the refreshing draught, or give the comforting nourishment! Think, also, of the many who would fall into that long last sleep, and be in that final hour

without a cheering smile or a tender look passing between the loving and the loved! O Father! we thank Thee that Thou hast saved us from such a retribution! But it may be that a longer and deeper darkness may be our fearful inheritance; for if we, like Pharaoh, say, 'Who is the Lord, that we should obey Him?' then, like Pharaoh, shall we be fit only for the habitation of the evil one.

Evidently the plague just mentioned must have been a sore trial to Pharaoh, for he sends for Moses and endeavours to make a compromise with him, by offering the children of Israel liberty to go into the wilderness to serve the Lord, but not to take their flocks and herds with them. This proposal was at once rejected by Moses, which so enraged Pharaoh, that he bade Moses to withdraw from his presence, and, under penalty of death, to see his face no more. Moses then fearlessly tells the King that he would see his face again no more. We can scarcely believe

that it is Moses thus answering the King, especially when we remember that, at an earlier period, Moses was afraid to enter the Court of Pharaoh. But now, with so much dignity, Moses retires from the King's presence.

The Lord is now about to send His last judgment upon the Egyptians for the deliverance of the Israelites—that appalling visitation that will break the yoke of Israel. One long wail of misery will be echoed throughout the land. Never before were the like throes of agony heard, and never again will they be heard. The same mournful note was struck; the only variation in the key was the fulness of the chord. Yes; God's fiat is to go forth at midnight, and the Lord will destroy all the first-born in Egypt! The same affliction will assail every household, from the first-born of the Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, to the first-born of the captive in the dungeon, and even to the first-born of all the cattle; thus showing to the Egyptians that in

the hand of Jehovah alone are the lives of all His creatures.

We well know that the loving God did not send these plagues simply to afflict. They were intended to produce a salutary effect on the minds of the Israelites, the mass of whom had sunk very low in their religious and intellectual life. Likewise, many of the Egyptians were taught to believe in Israel's God, especially when they saw their own idolatrous worship brought into such contempt. How could they continue in their Apis worship when they beheld that very idol afflicted with murrain ?—and how could they worship the sun-god when they beheld its light obliterated by the command of Israel's God ?

This last plague that was to deliver the Israelites was one that was to be ever memorable to all succeeding generations. Hitherto, the Israelites had only to be passive; now, the heads of each household had to act, as well as to believe. They had to sprinkle the

lintels and door-posts of each house with the blood of a lamb, so that when the Lord passed through to destroy the Egyptians, and should see the blood on the lintels and door-posts, He would prevent the destroying angel from entering their houses to smite them.

After the infliction of this plague, Pharaoh and the Egyptians were as urgent to get rid of the Israelites as they had formerly been to retain them. There was not a house where there was not one dead; and they feared that if they did not hasten the Israelites away, death would overtake them all. So anxious indeed were the Egyptians to send the Israelites away, that they gladly lent them what they required for the journey, even jewels of silver and gold, and also raiment.

It was the day after the Passover, on the fifteenth day of the first month, that the children of Israel went up out of Egypt. They left with a high hand in sight of all the Egyptians, and took their journey from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the

edge of the wilderness. We are told that the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, 'to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night; He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.'

By the command of the Lord, Moses encamped before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. The position was such that the Israelites were entangled in the land and shut in by the wilderness. Word is carried to Pharaoh, which makes him see that the reason assigned by Moses, namely, to sacrifice in the wilderness, is only a pretext for the Israelites to flee from his yoke, and also that, from some unaccountable cause, they had reached the sea and were hemmed in on all sides. Pharaoh, having ascertained where they were encamped, determined to pursue them, thinking, no doubt, it would be an easy matter to conquer them in their present position. He took with him six hundred

chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them, and finally overtook the Israelites by the sea.

In following the children of Israel, we find that they had scarcely time to rejoice at their exit from Egypt, before they beheld Pharaoh with a mighty army pursuing them. We are not kept in doubt as to their feelings at this moment. They displayed at once a want of confidence and trust in their leader, for we hear them exclaiming to Moses, 'Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Did not we tell thee in Egypt, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians?'

And how did Moses receive such upbraiding? Does he now show his superiority to those he is appointed to govern? Ah! Moses has passed through the furnace, and has come forth purified. The cold and biting winds of adversity have done their work; the pruning-knife has lopped away many an ugly branch from that noble stem; and we

see Moses putting forth the fruits of faith, patience, and confidence in the God of Israel. A great character will always infuse strength into weaker minds. We now hear Moses declaring to the Israelites that the Lord will fight for them, and he bids them hold their peace and to go forward in the name of the Lord.

It is very painful to view the Israelitish character at the present time. Very low in their moral nature must they have fallen since they went forth to dwell in the land of Goshen. To think of the posterity of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob choosing servitude and slavery in preference to a life of freedom! Not that they objected to the freedom, but their undisciplined natures rebelled against the many obstacles in their path to the happy Canaan. We here behold the effects of slavery; and we may be quite sure such would be the result with any nation brought under the evil influence of a life of bondage.

It may, however, be possible for any one of us to yield ourselves to a greater slavery than that endured by the Israelites while in Egypt. Think of the fatal effects of any one bad habit; of one sin growing with our growth, and absorbing all the good and beautiful parts of our character; so that when we would be free, the chain of sin has become so tightly forged that it becomes impossible to cast aside the fetters that bind us, or to disentangle ourselves from the meshes which we ourselves have interwoven. May not we compare sin to the deadly aphis holding in bondage the beautiful rose? The lovely bud is so tightly imprisoned that it cannot cast around its sweet perfume, or even open its rich petals to the admiring gaze.

To facilitate the movements of the Israelites and to hinder the Egyptians, the angel of the Lord, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind the Israelites, so that the pillar of cloud thus came between them and the Egyptians. To the former, the

pillar was a cloud of light, but to the latter a cloud of darkness.

By the Divine command, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord caused the sea to go back. The children of Israel then went into the midst of the sea on dry ground. The Egyptians, however, pursued after them, but the Lord removed their chariot-wheels, and eventually caused the sea to return to its former strength, so that when the Egyptians would have fled from the Israelites they could not, for the sea overwhelmed them. Thus were the Egyptians overthrown in the midst of the sea, whilst the Israelites were delivered from the hands of the Egyptians. When the Israelites saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore, they were impressed with the great work which the Lord had done upon the Egyptians, and the people feared and believed the Lord.

Though these visitations were pointedly sent to Pharaoh and his people because they would not obey God's will by letting the

children of Israel depart from the land of Egypt, yet the Lord was teaching the Egyptians, by the display of His mighty power and glory, that there was no other God like unto Him. And even the Israelites, who had been so long surrounded by the Egyptian idolatry, needed these instructive lessons, that their minds might be impressed by the supremacy of the God of Israel above all other gods; so that, if they afterwards dared to rebel against the King of Kings, they too, like Pharaoh, would at last be overthrown.



X.

THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL AT SIN AND REPHIDIM.

How we shall often marvel at the conduct of the children of Israel as we follow their steps through the wilderness! We cannot hear their murmurings, rising from time to time with such rebellious force, without greatly condemning their conduct; and while condemning, we must remember that we are often displaying the same Israelitish spirit.

We see the people arrive at Marah. Thirsty, worn, and weary they must have been, for they had been three days in the wilderness and had found no water. When they did find it, lo! it was bitter. Poor things! they looked at their wives and their little ones thirsting and fainting, and also at

their dumb animals, whose parched tongues showed how painfully they likewise felt the need of water.

But what were the feelings of Moses? Did not he endure thirst? And what was more, were not all those thousands of souls looking to him for food and succour? How could he have borne such looks if he had not cried and hearkened unto the Lord his God? May we all earnestly desire to be the possessors of such patience and meekness as Moses exhibited; for, notwithstanding the murmurings of the people, he answered them not a word.

The Israelites had only to look at the pillar to know it was a heavenly path they were tracking; therefore, if they had turned their hearts to the Lord, He would have brought them relief. They were not to expect exemption from trial because they were in the path in which the Lord had placed them, nor because God had called them to be His chosen people. To be spiritually strong we shall have to drink many a bitter

draught from the waters of Marah, and must expect to encounter many a rough wave of disappointment.

Before the waters of Marah were changed from bitterness to sweetness certain virtues had to be exercised, viz.: Faith—to trust the Lord's word; Obedience—to act upon that word; and Diligence, Activity, and Energy to cast the tree into the bitter waters. Are not the same virtues demanded now of us, as they were then of the children of Israel? Had the people trusted in the Lord they would not have murmured; and if in the present age God's people trusted more fully to His word, they would not so often be found displaying a similar spirit.

Oh, that lovely trait, obedience! What rich and precious fruit does not it bring forth! but without diligence, activity, and energy, none need wonder should the produce from their tree be nought else but bitterness; for a sluggish soul can be in the possession of no good thing.

The pillar of cloud has been moving on, and at last it has stopped in the wilderness of Sin. From that dreary and lonely spot come forth the murmurings of that rebellious people. Again they are angry with Moses, for they are desiring the flesh-pots and bread of Egypt. The Lord has heard their murmurings, and without even a single rebuke tells the Israelites by His servant Moses: 'At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread.' Oh, the forbearance and the tender love of God, after such murmurings to send them food—

'Unseen before by human eye,
Untouched before by human hand.'

Very early had their hands to be busy to gather in their morning meal, for if they waited till the sun was hot their food melted. This is a fit type of the slothful and sluggish mind, which allows the early morning opportunities of life to pass away. Noontide heat is bad for any work, but the firstfruits of a youthful heart are ever most precious in the

sight of the Lord. With a rich, full promise does the Lord say: 'They that seek Me early shall find Me.'

In following the course of the children of Israel, we find them by the command of the Lord pitching in Rephidim, and there their faith is again tried. They are placed in the balance, and grievously are they found wanting.

Since the last miraculous draught of water that had quenched their parched lips, what had not God granted to them? Before their eyes, morning and evening, lay their earthly requests. For them were the fowl of the air and the bread of heaven scattered on the surface of the earth; in fact, brought forth liberally out of God's garner, so that the earthly desires of the Israelites might be satisfied. Might not we have reasonably expected to hear fewer murmurings, and to look for some little trust and faith in Him who was thus so abundantly strewing their path and so visibly watching over them by

night and by day? No! they knew not their loving God. Therefore they did not see His long-suffering kindness. Their evil passions and desires blinded their ungrateful hearts.

When they found no water at Rephidim, they not only greatly rebelled, but they even asked, 'Is the Lord among us or not?' What a question! They had eyes, but they saw not. Theirs was no life of simple faith. If they had only opened their stubborn hearts it would have been a life of sight; for, what was the meaning of that cloud beside the camp? Darkness might pervade the night, but no darkness could surround the camp of the Israelites, for a brilliancy of light far greater than that of moon or stars illuminated their path. And again there was created for them a perennial harvest; yet, in the midnight darkness of their benighted souls they saw it not. Is not it scripturally true that the Israelites were not more dark, nor more rebellious and ungrateful, than those of us

who will neither obey nor love the Lord our God?

The first battle which the children of Israel waged in their journey towards the promised land was with Amalek.

The cause of this war arose, no doubt, through the hatred which the descendants of Esau felt towards the Israelites; for the Edomites had never forgotten the loss of their birthright. War is always painful, but it was a necessity in those early times, from the hardness of men's hearts, to have rights thus settled.

A very lovely sight it is to turn and look upon Moses on this occasion. He ascends to the top of the hill, and looks down upon the valley beneath, and there he beholds the enemy encountering the warrior Joshua with the chosen men of Israel. Moses was not alone. He needed human assistance in that long intercessory prayer. For Israel to prevail, the hands of Moses must be kept extended upwards towards heaven. If his

hands fall, the enemy would be victorious. Thus the Israelites were taught that their strength must ever come from God.

Is not Moses a beautiful type of our blessed Saviour, who from His heavenly kingdom looks down upon us whilst we are fighting with Satan, and doing battle against our sins? He, the mighty Saviour, is ever interceding for us, never leaving us to war alone, but through His Spirit helping us to join that army which is ever victorious under the inspired words Jehovah-nissi!



XI.

MOUNT SINAI.

If the sacred historian had not recorded the time that had transpired since the children of Israel left Egypt, we should have expected a much longer period had elapsed, for never, in so short a space of time, had God manifested to any people such mighty and distinguished power, as He had shown to the children of Israel between the time they left Egypt and their arrival at Mount Sinai.

It was that very rapidity of events and consequent excitement that had made the Israelites unfitted, till the present moment, to enter into a special covenant with God.

Here we find them permanently encamped in the midst of scenery of solemn beauty, enclosed by rugged and venerable mountains of

dark granite, and stern and naked peaks of indescribable grandeur. The deep and solemn silence of such mountain scenery was well fitted to bring their minds into that religious repose, and to produce that awe and reverence which God's immediate presence was intended to inspire.

We hear God commanding Moses to repeat the injunction to the people to keep off from the mountain. How beautiful the mercy and the love of God seem, thus displayed in sending Moses a second time to the people with this injunction! God knew their rebellious hearts, and was not willing on this solemn day of giving the law that any judgment should fall upon them. How frequently in this respect do the loving hearts of parents and teachers show forth the same spirit! How many warnings and injunctions do they give to their loved ones, to save them from the sufferings which, by their waywardness, folly, or indiscretion, they bring upon themselves!

If man had not become a sinful creature, God would not have shown forth that terrible strife of the elements; but man must be led to the knowledge of sin, and be taught to feel the awful majesty of God. Man, in a pure and holy state, would behold calmly and tranquilly that display of the might and majesty of God. Not having sin, man would have nothing to fear. Lightnings and thunders might war with Nature, but would find in him no response.

With the fall of Adam, Nature became in unison with the creature, and not until sin is destroyed will all creation return once more to its pristine purity. What must sin be, when even the touch of man would have defiled Mount Sinai, and death would have followed such an act of impiety?

Should not we endeavour somewhat to realize God's hatred to sin, and to remember that our hearts can never be the temple of the living God until we become His obedient children?

God, who sees into the inmost recesses of all hearts, knew what was the most besetting sin of the Israelites. Their sojourn in Egypt for upwards of four hundred years had destroyed the simple purity of their worship. The thick and turbid streams of idolatry had so commingled with the belief of the Israelites in the one true and unseen God, that, while claiming the supremacy of Jehovah, they seem to have desired a sensible representation of the true God. They had heard the Commandments delivered by the voice of the Lord, surrounded by such impressive solemnity that, with great fear and trembling, they desired Moses to speak to them the words that God should deliver. Still, the fear of displeasing the Lord did not, as we shall find, abide long with them; and though we may wonder at their rebellion and hardness of heart, we need not be surprised when we see, in the present age, with all the full, clear light which our blessed Saviour has thrown upon His Word, that the same

idolatry in kind, though not in act, still prevails.

God clearly commands us not to bow down to worship any image, or the likeness of anything. Therefore any act, or any gesture, that might be construed into a species of religious worship, is expressly forbidden. We may be told that images appeal to the mind through the medium of the senses, but all history proves that they cannot be used without producing gross superstition. And again, they who seek to level the Word of God to their own views and vain desires, will most certainly bring upon themselves and succeeding generations that fearful visitation which God has promised. Therefore let us hold with all tenacity the commands of God. Idolatry assumes many forms, and that which is harmless in itself, and given to us for pure enjoyment, may be so abused as to make us forget Him, who alone is worthy of our supreme thought.

God has declared that we are not to take

His name in vain. One is apt to think that many put their own interpretation on this commandment, for on trivial occasions in common conversation, and in an irreverent manner, to give emphasis to expressions, that Holy Name is often carelessly introduced. They who thus use God's Name do not consider they are among those who break the third Commandment.

Of all the commandments that were given to Moses from Mount Sinai, none are so fruitful to the human soul as the divine injunction, 'To keep holy the Sabbath day.' In providing for the human race *that* one day in seven, what omniscient love and infinite depths were portrayed! A rest, so essential to the recruiting powers of man, whether mental or physical, to say nothing of the rich opportunities enjoyed for gathering together spiritual strength and knowledge, and thereby enabling man to breast the difficulties of his working hours.

There is nothing that lends such a charm,

and casts such a halo of refinement round the character of the young, as obedience. When we see children rendering honour to their parents, we feel our hearts impressed and elevated; for never can God's laws be obeyed without inspiring a greater respect for the doer, and a greater reverence for those laws that can produce such good results in the character of man.

Who are those that bear false witness against their neighbours? Are not they frequently talebearers, repeating unkind and cruel remarks without any foundation for the truthfulness of the slander which is thus spread? Has not God declared that for every idle word we must give an account? And what account shall we be able to render for the many thoughtless accusations which we have, through hearsay, ofttimes repeated?

Those who are in possession of a contented mind will escape the temptation to break the tenth commandment. If we early learn to think of the wondrous love of God, we shall

rest content in that love, desiring no earthly possession which He withholds. When our hearts are going towards objects which we do not possess, let us endeavour to obtain a fuller and more contented spirit, knowing that a heart thus richly laden will not covet the possession of things belonging to others.



XII.

THE GOLDEN CALF.

THE Holy Word teaches us, that God delivered the ten commandments to the children of Israel, and that whilst they were being proclaimed amidst the thunderings, and lightnings, and the smoke at the top of the mount, the fear of the children of Israel was so great, that they begged Moses himself to repeat to them God's commandments, and not let them hear the voice of God, lest they should die.

Nor did Adam, after he had sinned, desire to hear the voice of God. No! the finite and the infinite may mingle, but not sin and holiness. While Adam was perfect, yet finite, the voice of God would bring ecstasy to his soul, but when sin had defaced the

image of God, the sounds of perfection, rolling across the troubled soul of Adam, would bring to his mind only too painfully the immense chasm which he had wrought between the Creator and the creature.

After Moses had finished telling the people all the commandments and all the judgments of the Lord, they answered with one voice, and said, 'All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient.' Scarcely, however, had the sounds of their united promise ceased vibrating among those mountain tops, before hill upon hill echoed with the shouts and songs of the rebellious and disobedient Israelites.

Yes! there they are, eating, drinking, dancing, and ascribing to the golden calf the power of having brought them from the land of Egypt. God beholds their wickedness, and sends Moses in haste from the mount. Before he reaches the camp, he hears their shouts, and knows it is the noise of revelry. With rapid strides and eager steps he reaches

the camp, there to see God's chosen people dancing and making merry before that golden calf. Who can tell the anguish of his soul as he looked upon their idolatry? Would not Moses think that all his labour, suffering, and sorrow for the children of Israel had been in vain?

Oh! wonder not that, with such a scene rising before his eyes, Moses forgot the precious burthen he bore. Had not he just left those high altitudes surrounded by the brightness and the glory of the Invisible One? Therefore, the present sight might well stir the inmost recesses of his soul. His was a noble and righteous anger, and in the bitterness of his heart did he cast from him those laws, which were to become the strength of nations, so that his hands might be free to destroy the evil that he beheld.

We know there is such a thing as a righteous indignation, for did not our Lord display it when He made a scourge of small cords and drove out from the Temple all those who

trafficked therein? The Apostle Paul also, in writing to the Ephesians, said, 'Be ye angry and sin not.' It is necessary to distinguish at all times between a righteous anger and that which is not. We may be perfectly sure that he who can look calmly upon oppression, injustice, and a want of zeal for the honour of God, will never display a righteous indignation, though such an one may often display an anger that allies him to the evil one.

The foot-prints of sin may sometimes bear the impress of great virtue, but the track is so different, that the thoughtful beholder will soon discern the difference between the true and false. We all need, therefore, to remember the injunction to take heed what manner of spirit we are of, for the spirit will at all times testify to the purity of our work.

It is difficult to define Aaron's conduct in making the golden calf, but we feel sure it did not arise from the love of idol-worship. Most likely it was from great fear of the

people. If he had exercised strong faith and moral courage, this grievous sin and rebellion would have been spared. He might have suffered as a martyr, but it would have been a noble testimony and encouragement to future generations. We must bear in mind the position in which Aaron at that moment was placed. He was to act in Moses' stead. He was to govern not only the Israelites, but also a mixed multitude, who, when they left Egypt with the Israelites, had been no doubt all their lives accustomed to idolatrous worship. The absence of Moses for a few days might seem strange, but when those days could be reckoned by weeks, we can easily imagine how painful Aaron's position would be. Besides, authority given for an uncertain period of time greatly weakens the power of any ruler.

The manner in which the people addressed Aaron in speaking of Moses shows at once their rebellious spirit. We hear them saying, 'This Moses, the man that brought us up

out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.' Theirs were indeed hardened hearts; too hard to comprehend the love and devotion of such a leader as Moses. God, however, knew their hearts, and proved them; for if Moses had not been detained forty days in the mount, the idolatry in their hearts would not have been so soon displayed.

When, a second time, Moses ascends Mount Sinai, the same period of time elapses before he returns to the children of Israel. No doubt much good resulted from this absence, for those moral laws could not be again renewed without their minds being duly impressed with their divine origin. They were being taught a lesson which we all find so hard to learn, namely, that of patiently waiting on Him who alone can determine times and seasons for all events.

Day by day would they linger about the foot of the mount, anxiously gazing upward for the return of their leader. When he did

appear, even his brother Aaron was afraid to look upon him, for the face of Moses was illuminated with the glory from heaven, though he knew it not. So is it with those who live in close communion with our Saviour. They carry a spiritual power and influence frequently unknown to themselves, yet so indelible are the marks which they leave behind, that no waves of time can ever efface them.

What true humility appears in the conduct of Moses. He had been for days dwelling in a brightness greater than that of the sun, and when he left the presence of the King of Kings, the rays of that glory still shone around him. Finding he had brought the brightness of heaven to earth, he dims that brightness by casting a veil over his face. Who of us would have so acted? If we had visited a King and he had bestowed upon us some bright gift, would we veil it? Oh no! We should talk about the royal present, and also of having been the guest of the King,

and we should display to beholders the royal gift.

When Moses entered into God's presence, he removed the veil from off his face. Yes! in that presence all hearts are unfolded. We, too, when we enter that heavenly presence, must lay aside every veil. Nothing can obscure any act or thought from that all-searching eye. If the brightness that beamed from the face of Moses was so glorious that the children of Israel could not behold it, what must that brightness be which we, who love Christ, shall one day behold?



XIII.

THE TABERNACLE.

TOWARDS the building of the tabernacle Moses commanded that whosoever was of a willing heart should bring an offering unto the Lord. We do not find him making any stirring harangue. He does not endeavour to produce any false excitement, but he simply enumerated the materials that would be requisite for the erection of the tabernacle.

No doubt there were two classes that were most desirous to testify their whole-heartedness in the Divine command. Those who had worshipped the golden calf would be glad of this opportunity to evince their sincere repentance; and those who had not joined in the idol worship would be desirous to show themselves more zealous in the

worship of God than the idolater had been in the worship of his idol.

It is very delightful to see with what avidity the people responded to the words of Moses. They did not wait until their good impulses had died away, nor did they defer offering their gifts; for it appears that so much was brought for the tabernacle that Moses had at last to restrain the people.

What a pleasant change do we thus behold in the children of Israel after their hard and rebellious ways! To see them, with eager generosity, ready to give both labour and riches towards building a house for the Lord, is like coming suddenly upon an oasis in the desert.

We can easily picture to ourselves how eagerly the women would select from their stores the best and choicest gifts—now finding a beautiful piece of cloth, then some fine white linen, and even unclasping their nose-rings; and before taking these gifts to Moses, going to their neighbour's tent to display the

lovely purple, blue or scarlet cloth, or perhaps some precious gem which their husbands had mingled with their offerings. Those who gave so freely had, we may be quite sure, many a joyful and happy feeling, for God loveth a cheerful giver; and we may further delight in the thought that they who please God will ever bask in the sunshine of the purest happiness.

We must not look upon Bezaleel and Aholiab as being totally ignorant of handicraft, for even at that period of time the Egyptians were greatly skilled in all kinds of workmanship. We find that God not only filled Bezaleel and Aholiab with His Spirit, in wisdom, in knowledge, and in understanding, but every wise-hearted man also was stirred up to come to the work. As it is from God that we receive all our wisdom and understanding, we should never glory in our power or our intellect. Instead of being proud of our success, we should feel thankful to our

Heavenly Father for gifts so liberally bestowed.

In reading about the tabernacle we must bear in mind that the priest's dress and the religious rites were intended to be typical of Christ. In that infant state of the Church the minds of the Israelites were so ignorant that it was necessary to have their senses impressed by gorgeous colours and imposing rites. As it was then, so it has been in all succeeding ages, that whenever a people or nation is enthralled by the pomp and show of religious services, we may be quite certain that the spiritual has not attained that vigour and life which will enable it to dwell upon the unseen, nor to realize the pure simplicity of the beautiful.

Aaron's garments were called holy, not that there was any mystic virtue pervading those official robes, but the word 'holy' is used to show that the garments were not for common use. They were to be worn solely while engaged in the religious services of the

Lord. Outward adornment forms no essential part of true religion, for the soul of Lazarus beneath his pauper rags possessed far more of heaven's own brightness than that of the rich man, though sumptuously arrayed in fine linen.

The priest's garments were commanded to be of fine white linen. Woollen texture was strictly forbidden to be worn. No doubt cleanliness was one motive for this injunction; but white, being an emblem of purity, would remind the worshipping Israelites of that moral purity which God, through their religious services, was daily teaching them.

The small bells that were fastened on the edge of Aaron's robe came a little below the knee, so that as he moved about the holy place the sound of those many bells must have been very pleasant to the people in their wilderness life. And is not it sweet, in this our wilderness life to hear the music of our own dear Sabbath bells, calling to all of us to go up to worship the Lord our God?

When, in some quiet home, we find a sick one who cannot join the multitude, how the sound of those sweet bells wafted along by the zephyr breeze bears many a happy and heavenly thought to the heart of that one, who can only unite in spirit, and not in presence, with the Church below!

The names of the children of Israel were engraved on the shoulder-pieces and on the breastplate of the high-priest; and as he alone was allowed to enter the most holy place, all the tribes would feel that Aaron was bearing their names into the most holy of holies, there to act as their mediator, and endeavour to expiate their sins through the performance of those especial religious rites which God for a time had commanded.

When the true Mediator and perfect High-Priest appeared, the shadow had then to give place to the substance. Not only the names of every tribe, but the names of every one of God's children, will be engraven on the fleshly tablets of Christ's heart; for not

one of His children will be ever forgotten by Him, who, having loved His own, will love them to the end.

Never let us doubt that perfect love—a love that nothing but our sins can obscure—a love that no plummet can sound nor the highest of heights reach—a love, the comprehension of which finite man can never conceive; and a love so universal that the first sigh of the contrite spirit towards its heavenly home is preserved as the purest incense for those heavenly realms.





XIV.

THE SINS OF MURMURING AND JEALOUSY.

WHAT a joy it must have been to the children of Israel when they saw the tabernacle completed! They had now a place for worship, and, what was more, they knew that in the most sacred spot of the tabernacle there dwelt the symbolical presence of the Lord. However hard and thankless their hearts, they could not doubt the nearness of their heavenly guide, for they had only to turn towards the tabernacle to see that the Lord was with them. The darkest night, also, could not obscure the light that shone about them from that fiery pillar, nor could the hot rays of a noon-day sun pierce through that

cloud, which led them through the trackless desert of Arabia.

In the infancy of our lives we gain our knowledge through the medium of our senses; and God, in His great and condescending love, thus taught His chosen people. In truth, the effulgent glory of the second Person in the Trinity was fully displayed to those murmuring Israelites. So overpowering was that glory, that Moses even was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation. The Divine love was not shown only for them, but that we also might learn those lessons of faith and trust which were taught in those early ages through the visible wonders of Providence.

When we look at the Israelites at that period of time, we cannot help exclaiming, What a happy, happy life theirs ought to have been! The Lord was leading them to their earthly Canaan. Every day He sent them bread from Heaven; and in the dry and arid desert, water issued from the stony rock.

They could not, in their young religious life, see the glory which encompassed them. Their senses were affected, but this feeling was effervescent. With their uncultivated hearts they were not able to receive more than types and shadows of those spiritual blessings which we now enjoy.

The pious Israelite could not behold the sacrifice of the Lamb, morning and evening, without remembering that God had promised that His Son would one day die for him. Thus the Israelite looked forward to the coming of Christ, even as we now look back and behold the glorious fulfilment of the Divine Word. In the present age we stand, as it were, looking at a complete picture, with the light falling on it so perfectly that we perceive at a glance the full effect and intention of the whole; but the Israelites, who form a part of the picture, could only see an unfinished design. They, therefore, did not know how their murmurings and unbelief marred the beauty of the work.

How true it is that idleness begets mischief! We find that as soon as the tabernacle was finished, the murmuring and discontented spirits of the Israelites returned. All the while they were preparing for the erection of the tabernacle, we did not hear a discordant sound; but when occupation ceased, then selfish wishes and vain desires arose. From the creation of the first man, down even to the end, it will be found that without activity there can be no happiness. He who is not true to nature, can never possess those moral attributes that link him to the Great Unknown.

The murmuring spirit of the children of Israel is as apparent now as it was in the days of Moses. How frequently must God's children be grieved at the daily murmurings of those who profess to be the followers of Christ! They do not perceive that their murmuring, grumbling and complaining are the acts of an alien. The child that truly loves the Lord rests peaceably on Him who doeth all things well.

The next grievous sin that appeared in the camp of the Israelites was jealousy. It arose in the hearts of a prophetess of the Lord and of a high-priest. Well may we remember the injunction, to take heed as to what manner of spirit we are of, when we behold such a hateful sin displayed by those who had been set apart to be lights to their more ignorant brethren.

A sin must be always judged by its consequences. What may be only a small offence in an ignorant man, may become a terrible sin in one who holds a sacred office. He who assumes the high position of enlightening others, and yet dishonours his sacred calling by causing weaker ones to sin, must, when this earthly vail is withdrawn, recoil with horror when he beholds how sins, that he scarcely thought upon, have flowed with their contaminating influence, blighting and blasting many a sapling that would otherwise have grown in beauty and moral strength.

Miriam had indeed fallen from her high

estate when she permitted the scorpion of jealousy to enter into her heart; but Aaron, also, was only too ready to give access to this unholy feeling; and although he did not personally suffer, owing doubtless to the sacredness of his office as high-priest, still he must have keenly felt Miriam's punishment. When Miriam presented herself to Aaron, according to the law in Leviticus, and he pronounced her unclean, he no doubt experienced a deep sense of his own sinfulness. We read, with reference to their conduct, that the anger of the Lord was kindled, and if Moses had not interceded for Miriam, she would have been a leper for the remainder of her life.

What would be our case if we had not an Intercessor greater than Moses? Few, indeed could be found without some unholy passion. When tempted with envy or jealousy, let us strive to think of God's anger with Miriam; and so shall we learn to know how a pure God looks upon such a sin.

XV.

CANAAN LOST.

MOSES, by the command of the Lord, sent out twelve men, one from each tribe, to report on the land of Canaan. After forty days they returned, bringing back an unfavourable report. They certainly said it was a goodly land, flowing with milk and honey, and they also brought a cluster of grapes, which was carried between two of them, upon a staff; but they stated that when they saw the inhabitants their hearts utterly failed them, because they beheld a stronger race than themselves.

It seems strange, however, when the children of Israel saw those beautiful grapes, that they did not desire to go up at once and possess such a rich land. We must not

imagine that it was necessary for the spies to adopt that peculiar mode of carrying the grapes on account of their extraordinary bulk; but that method was pursued so that the people might see the fruit in its more perfect state. If they had remembered the stunted grapes of Egypt, the contrast between the luxuriance of the one and the scantiness of the other would have made them grateful for the richness of the land that they were about to possess.

But the children of Israel were too ungrateful and discontented to enjoy any blessing. Such natures will always leap over the good, and be ready to magnify any supposed evil. In His great love, God had brought them into the wilderness to prepare them for the promised land, but their rebellious spirits would not profit by God's continued presence; therefore, they were at last condemned to die in the desert, and thus lose all hope of ever entering Canaan.

What a painful task it must have been for Moses, when he told the children of Israel

that they were not to enter the promised land! They were to be bereft of all expectation of ever beholding that long-looked-for country. They were never to see that rich land where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had dwelt; never again to partake of the luxuries of a civilized life; never to see the spot where their offspring would dwell; and then their last home was to be in that wilderness, the graves of which their children would be only too happy to leave behind.

After a long, dreary winter, we look forward to the coming spring with joy and gladness, and our hearts rejoice when the little warblers tell us of coming brightness. The season may be late, or it may be blended with summer; still, we prepare and hope for its renewal; but if the giver of all good gifts refused us the return of this bright season, what barren desolation would surround our hearts!

With the Israelites hope was now annihilated. Morning might return; evening would close; time would pursue its onward

course, but nothing would bring them nearer to the spot they had so yearned to reach. No comfort could possess them, for they had wilfully rebelled, and God in His righteous judgment had pronounced His decree.

Is not it possible that we, like those Israelites, may never reach the promised land? The heavenly Jerusalem is offered to us; Christ is our leader, and it is only by obeying the Commandments of God, instead of the desires of our own evil hearts, that we, like Joshua and Caleb, shall be enabled to reach the happy Canaan.

That generation of Israelites soon showed too painfully how unfit they would have been to enter the promised land. If they could not preserve unity among themselves, how could they retain that strength which would have been necessary to conquer the country which God had promised?

No cursory view of the position of Moses will enable us to form a just idea of what he was called upon to endure. When closely reviewed, however, it presents to us a long

life of patient forbearance, for he had to lead and govern a wilful nation that neither would nor could understand the noble motives that actuated their leader. His first generous act, for which he was obliged to flee from the court of Pharaoh, seems to have been a type of what he would have to bear in becoming the deliverer of this stubborn nation. His elevated character must also have made him feel very painfully the rebellion and jealousy of Korah. How dreadfully Korah's rebellious expressions must have fallen upon the ear of Moses, for well he knew that the righteous God would vindicate his cause, and that destruction to Korah and his company would follow.

Of all disputes, religious ones are the most painful. Blinded by what is considered conscientious, envy, jealousy, and hatred are too often called by the antagonists to the aid of their religious scruples. Thus the evil in our nature is developed, and the progress of what is good and ennobling is arrested.

When the children of Israel were stricken with the plague, we see the character of Aaron as high-priest beautifully sustained. Quite forgetful of himself, and only anxious to save those who were manifesting so much hatred towards Moses and himself, he rushed into the midst of the congregation with the censer, containing the sacred fire, and by this atonement stopped the plague. It was a noble act, and nobly done. The people in their anger might at once have killed him, but through the forgetfulness of himself he was enabled to save his fellow-creatures. He who would be a blessing to others must be ever ready to sacrifice money, time, talent, or whatsoever the nature of the circumstance demands. When love for our fellow-creatures triumphs over all obstacles; then does man partake of that pure joy which they only can feel who, forgetful of self, are influenced by the highest and noblest motives.

The sight of Aaron's rod, laden with buds, blossoms and fruit, removed at once from

the envious Israelites all doubts of the divine appointment of Aaron. Like all God's miracles, the phenomenon which had convinced their senses was symbolical of some spiritual truth, the value of which the few only would be able to appreciate.

Aaron's rod was a scion plucked from an almond tree. As soon as the genial sun sheds its warm rays, this tree is the first to brighten our earth with its beauty. In like manner, when a heart is touched with the spiritual rays that fall from the Sun of Righteousness, then are brought forth those beautiful blossoms, that alone can fructify the dark spots of this earth.

In the buds, blossoms and fruit on Aaron's rod, may not we see the progressive stages of the Christian life, and call to mind Christ's words, 'By your fruit ye shall be known'? Let us therefore be anxious that our fruit may be of that kind which shall never wither, but shall bloom through all the countless ages of eternity.



XVI.

PUNISHMENT.

WHEN the children of Israel arrived at Zin and found no water there, they murmured and gathered themselves together against Moses and Aaron. The Lord then commanded Moses to take the rod and speak to the rock before the eyes of the people. Moses, however, instead of obeying the Divine command, forgot the presence of Him Who would have given strength to bear with the rebellious multitude. Losing, in a moment of anger, his self-control, he struck the rock, and addressing the people as rebels, he ascribed unto himself and Aaron the power of bringing water out of the rock. Moses thus magnified himself, and forgot to

give the glory to the God of Israel. How unlike the usual conduct of Moses!

The punishment that followed might seem great for the offence, but we must not forget the position in which Moses stood. His light, knowledge and understanding, were far greater than that of any other man by whom he was surrounded. He had been the leader of this people for nearly forty years, and thus to speak and act before the assembly of the great congregation, called for a punishment that should prove God's great displeasure.

What a lesson for us all! To see a man so pre-eminent for his meekness, yet, at such a time, and such a moment, to forget his high and holy calling!

Both Moses and Aaron had sinned at the waters of Meribah, and God in His inflexible justice had declared that neither of them should enter the promised land. Very soon after this judgment Aaron's punishment followed; for, when Moses and Aaron arrived at Mount Hor, the Lord said unto Moses

that Aaron should be gathered unto his people. In that wild solitude, however, no burial-ground or sepulchre had been ever seen. None of his family had found a last resting-place in that lone spot. The expression, therefore, 'To be gathered to his people,' had a far higher and important meaning. It shows that the Israelites did, in those early ages, believe in another and more glorious life, where body and soul should again mingle in unison, and where absent spirits would unite in a holier and more perfect sympathy than could be ever obtained in this earthly state. Theirs was but a dim light compared to the knowledge which we enjoy, through the resurrection of our Saviour. In those early ages, this great truth was as imperfect as the sombre light we receive from the moon, when she is veiled from us by the floating clouds.

It was no mean trial for Aaron to be forbidden the promised land. The one strong desire of his heart was shattered. In his

long desert life, how often had he wished for a sight of that happy Canaan! and now the fulfilment of this hope was annihilated.

The command had gone forth that Aaron was to ascend that high summit of Mount Hor, in company with his brother and eldest son. See the venerable old man, arrayed for the last time in his pontifical garments, entering the tabernacle and taking a long last look at that sacred place which must have been so dear to the good old priest, and many an elder of Israel coming forward to take another and another farewell, and the whole congregation looking on in solemn silence, beholding that aged priest labouring to ascend the mount.

What a rebuke Aaron's punishment would be to the people! for they must have felt their provocation had called forth this chastisement. And what must Moses have felt while removing the priestly garments from Aaron, and robing Eleazar for the service of God! When that work was done, nothing

remained but to see the last moments of him who had stood by the side of Moses when first he entered the Court of Pharaoh, and who had aided and helped him in many a fiery conflict with the rebellious Israelites.

Moses must now return with a more youthful high-priest by his side. The multitude would gaze with longing eyes as they saw Moses and Eleazar descend from the mount, but no inquiry need be made. They would not ask why Aaron did not return; for they knew, when he left them, that they should see his face no more; therefore, in sadness and silence, they would mourn for their first high-priest.

However much the children of Israel murmured, God was ever ready to hear Moses when he interceded for them. We find them often desiring other food than that which the Lord provided; and at last, in their discontentment, they declared their souls loathed the light bread. As a punishment, God therefore sent fiery serpents among them, so

that many of the people were bitten, and numbers died. The people then went to Moses and asked him to pray to God, for they had sinned. Moses appealed to the Lord, and was directed to make a fiery serpent and to put it on a pole, so that all might see it, and those that turned and looked upon it were at once healed.

Can we find a more beautiful emblem than this of that free forgiveness which is offered to all those who feel the need of a Redeemer's love? The children of Israel were not commanded to look twice or thrice. Only one look, and they became whole. That same mighty power asks no more now, of the sin-stricken soul. One believing look at the crucified Saviour, and we are healed.





XVII.

BALAAM.

If Sion, king of the Amorites, had allowed the children of Israel to pass through his land, neither he nor his subjects would have been destroyed; but he was like all selfish people who, while attempting to obstruct the progress of others, often unwittingly hasten their own downfall.

King Balak, being aware of the prosperity which had just attended the Israelites, naturally felt anxious to learn what might be his hope of success in warring against them. He therefore sent for the renowned soothsayer Balaam, who seemed to possess some knowledge of the true God; but his avaricious spirit prevented him from acting in that manner which would have been honourable

to himself, and would have brought glory to God. Balak's great offers stimulated Balaam to accept that which he ought to have refused. If Balaam had not been so anxious for mammon he would not have detained all night the men whom Balak had sent to him, but would have at once declined to accompany them, and would have thus removed the temptation. Balaam's heart, however, was set upon the journey, being desirous to obtain, if possible, the proffered gifts; and though a miracle was wrought on his way to Moab, still he would not return. True, the angel of the Lord told Balaam that he might go forward, but that he would be only enabled to speak the words which the Lord would direct.

We soon see Balaam humiliated, and returning to his own country. He had called forth the anger of the heathen king, and had lost the gifts which he had hoped to obtain. Nor could he find comfort from the voice of the monitor within; for well he knew how

ready he would have been to curse the Israelites, if he had not been restrained by a higher power. Thus Balaam gained the contempt of those who saw his vacillating conduct, and lost the high and noble reward which all good men earn when they prefer duty at any cost.

As with Balaam, so will it ever be with all who endeavour to tamper with principle. Our Saviour has declared we cannot serve two masters; nor can we expect to hold to right principles without experiencing both loss and suffering.



XVIII.

THE DEATH OF MOSES.

How pleasant to turn to the conduct of Moses after reviewing the worldly spirit of Balaam!

When the Lord bade Moses to go and view the promised land, his first thought was to care for the people he was about to leave. After making all suitable provision for the government of the children of Israel, he ascends the mount, views for the last time the promised Canaan, and is seen no more.

While thus coming to the close of the life of the greatest prophet that ever lived, one feels it impossible to leave his wonderful life without tracing the great analogy that exists between Moses and Him who was Prophet, Priest, and King.

Look at Moses in his infancy, preserved when all the male Hebrew children were destroyed. Thus also was Christ preserved, when Herod slew all the children in Bethlehem.

Did not Moses flee from his country to escape the wrath of the king, till at last there came the message, 'Go, return into Egypt, for all the men are dead that sought thy life'? In like manner Christ fled, until there came a message to Joseph and Mary in almost the same words, namely, 'Return, for they are dead which sought the young child's life.'

Immediately before emancipating the Israelites, Moses instituted the Passover; and Christ, before redeeming mankind, instituted the Lord's Supper.

When Moses appointed elders he chose seventy; and when Christ selected His disciples they likewise numbered seventy.

If the arms of Moses had not been kept extended, Amalek would not have been sub-

dued; nor would sinners have found salvation unless our Saviour had hung upon the cross.

The children of Israel could not enter the promised land till after the death of Moses; and it was only by the death of Christ that the kingdom of heaven was opened to all believers.

One might continue to enumerate many more types; but here are quite sufficient examples to prove the wonderful resemblance between the deliverer of the Israelites and the Redeemer of the World.

Thus do we behold the omniscient power of God guiding the affairs of the children of men; and, through each progressive step, developing human happiness, and increasing the glory of Him who is Lord over all.



XIX.

CROSSING THE JORDAN.

AFTER the death of Moses the Lord commanded Joshua to pass over the Jordan with all the children of Israel, and to take possession of the promised land.

Though having the utmost confidence in the Divine word, yet Joshua used every means to accomplish his purpose. Like an experienced general, he was anxious to know the strength of the enemy he was about to encounter. He therefore sent two trusty men to Jericho as spies. Joshua knew full well that God would not perform the work of man, and that if man did not co-operate with the Divine will, the end, though attained, would be with sorrow, instead of that joy and gladness which are the reward of the

diligent man when he has performed the work which the Lord had given him to do.

However much we may admire the beautiful faith and conduct of Rahab in sheltering Joshua's spies, yet we cannot fully justify all her acts. The deliberate falsehood she told the men whom the king of Jericho sent to inquire about the spies must be greatly condemned, although in her case, as some would urge, there might be many extenuating circumstances.

Lying is a vice ever prevalent among the heathen nations; and Rahab, from being accustomed to the worship of idols, came suddenly to the knowledge of the true God, through hearing of the marvellous events which had occurred to God's chosen people. All her actions prove that she felt her own nation was lost, and her strong and unenlightened faith in God made her more liable then to commit the sin which all must deplore. Had Rahab been better acquainted with Israel's God, one feels sure from such

zeal that she would have displayed as much love for truth as she had shown in her desire to save those men of Israel.

Nearly forty years had passed away since the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea, with little faith in their leader, and as little trust in Jehovah. Though they had seen the overthrow of Pharaoh and his host, yet the feeling of thankful deliverance was very evanescent; and so hardened were their hearts that God was obliged to condemn that generation to end their days in the wilderness. The happiness, therefore, of entering the promised land was reserved to the children of that rebellious race; and we observe with what different feelings these descendants prepared to enter Canaan.

Submissive, obedient, and full of confidence, they passed over Jordan. No hurry, no confusion; for they had learnt in their desert life to trust Him who was now leading them through an untrodden and unknown path.

Was their faith misplaced? Were those watery walls uplifted for only the strong and the mighty? Were not they likewise upheld for the mothers and the little ones, and the flocks and herds? Yes! the Angel of the Covenant was with them, even as He has promised to be with us when we pass through the waters from our earthly course into the heavenly Canaan.

If the priests that bore the Ark of the Lord had waited until they saw the waters retreating, they, like their predecessors, would have never entered Canaan. They had to dip their feet into the brim of the waters before the waters retreated; and when they were standing on firm ground in the midst of Jordan, then their faith was changed into the joy of sight.

What a lesson for God's people! for very many hope in their days of strength to possess dying grace. If the word of the Lord were more studied, Christians would have clearer views and stronger faith. They

would discover that no reserved spiritual strength is given. As God fed the children of Israel, so are His spiritual children fed, day by day. What they gather they must use. If they gather but little manna their souls must famish; and if they gather much without dispensing it to other souls they will find that their faith is unstable and their spiritual vision too imperfect to help to brighten the course of those who naturally might look to them to aid and strengthen their spiritual life.

The Lord commanded the Israelites to take twelve stones from the midst of Jordan, and to erect them as a memorial of this miraculous passage, so that when the children of succeeding generations should see the stones, they might inquire, 'What mean ye by these stones?' Here we notice that God expects us to exercise our mental faculties, and not to be indifferent to the objects that surround us. We also observe that the wonders displayed to the Israelites were not

for them only, but that all the earth might be taught the lessons of faith and trust in God, who is ever ready to accept any people who acknowledge Him as Lord over all.

XX.

THE TAKING OF JERICHO.

THE children of Israel came up out of Jordan, on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal. On the fourteenth day of the month, they kept the passover in the plains of Jericho, where they were surrounded with a plentiful supply of the grain which they had so much desired. They had not to wait till they entered Jericho before obtaining the corn, because it was the method in the East to store the old corn in subterranean granaries in the fields. The owners having fled within the walls of Jericho, the corn thus fell into the hands of the Israelites.

When the stranger with the drawn sword appeared unto Joshua, the latter behaved like

a bold and brave warrior, and at once demanded whether he was speaking to a friend or to an enemy. Joshua displayed the necessary courage for his position, and also strong faith and reliance in Him who had led the Israelites across the Jordan, and who, as the Angel of the Covenant, now appeared to Joshua, in order to direct him in the overthrow of Jericho.

As the taking of Jericho was the work of God, and not the work of man, the priests, and not the men of war, were made the medium through which the miracle was to be accomplished.

It does not appear that Joshua revealed at once the instructions he had received from the Lord regarding the taking of Jericho, for we are led to suppose, as in the case of crossing the Jordan, that only as the circumstances arose were the Israelites informed what part to act.

What a striking lesson of faith this must have been to the people of Israel! There

they were, quietly marching round those walls; removed at a sufficient distance to escape the enemy's missiles, yet not so far removed but that they might hear the scoffs and ridicule that doubtless arose from the inhabitants of Jericho. Such a sight was well calculated to harden the hearts of those heathens, who knew nothing of the power, and the might, and the grandeur, and the majesty of the God of Israel. It must have seemed to them such puerile work, to see that procession march round the walls only once, and then retire from sight until the next day.

We can easily imagine, that in many a Canaanitish heart a feeling of security was produced, when they beheld such conduct on the part of the men whom they were expecting to war against. As each day passed, the hope of the heathen would naturally revive, whilst the faith of the children of Israel must have been greatly tried. Though longing to possess Jericho, yet they were

returning day by day to their tents, and perhaps giving expression to their feelings, by declaring that they were no nearer their desired end than when they first compassed the city.

Are there not times when all our work seems a weary round? We wish to gain some point; but, we have to make many a circuit before we can reach it, and, like the morning before it breaks, we see the darkness thicken. Previous to the full fruition of our hopes, doubts arise, and we begin to feel that our most earnest prayers have rested like dew upon the mountain ere the morning sun has risen.

Such, indeed, must have been the feelings of many an Israelite before the seventh day came, for although each day they sounded their Jubilee horns, yet an outward rejoicing is not always the key-note to the heart.

On the seventh day, however, the Israelites rose up very early. Hence their expectations were aroused, and all their feelings and acts

were in unison, for they felt their triumph was near. Yes! heart and nature seemed to blend, when that one great shout levelled to the earth the walls of Jericho.

Mountain and hill repeated again and again the rejoicing sounds which have ever spread on from age to age, till their echoes have reached us, telling us that the same power which overthrew the walls of Jericho, will enable us, by faith, to cast aside all the temptations that might prove a hindrance to our entering the pure and perfect Canaan.



XXI.

ACHAN.

It is quite evident from the result of the first expedition of the Israelites to Ai that Joshua had not consulted the Divine will, else the sin of Achan would have been then revealed.

The men whom Joshua had sent seemed to expect that God would give Ai into their hands in a way somewhat similar to that in which they had gained Jericho. Great, therefore, was the consternation of the Israelites when they saw that they were overthrown. Joshua, also, seems most painfully to have realized the appalling situation in which they all stood, if they were really forsaken by the mighty God of Israel. Embosomed as they were in the midst of the

Canaanitish people, they could be, in a few hours, swept from the face of the earth. Until the sinner who had wrought such mischief to Israel had been discovered and punished, the Israelites would not be restored to God's favour.

The Israelites outwardly were in such a position that they were envied by all the surrounding nations. They possessed a God all-powerful, and also an earthly leader which those heathen nations must have thought invincible. But if we examine the children of Israel inwardly, we find them wretched and in despair, for God is not with them.

How plainly we are taught the lesson, that if God should leave us to ourselves, neither riches, nor power, nor even earthly friends, can bring us happiness. The pleasures of sin are only for a very little season.

When Achan took of the spoils which it was a sacrilege to keep, because they were dedicated to the Lord, he tasted of the pleasure of sin, and rejoiced in his heart over

the fine apparel and the treasures which he had hid. He, however, experienced very soon the bitterness of sin, and the fear of being detected.

Ah! when Joshua, by the command of God, instituted that rigorous investigation, how dreadful must have been the feelings of Achan and his family. They saw their own tribe taken; and then the family from which Achan sprang. Then the households of that family were brought, man by man. Oh! how narrow grows the circle. Again the lot is cast, and now it falls upon the thief.

Yes! this man Achan had dared to take of the things that belonged unto the Lord, and who could or would vindicate his cause? The eagle might soar onward and upward in its highest flight, but Achan's soul must cleave to the dust. Nor could Achan lean upon an earthly arm, for he had caused his own children to become sufferers in his crime, and they also, like him, must die an ignominious death. Even all that they had

touched was sin-defiled, and, therefore, they and their treasures were all taken to the valley of Achor, and there destroyed.

We finite creatures, mingling as we do daily in the atmosphere of sin, do not perceive the dust that collects on our plumage; and it is only as our spiritual vision becomes purified, that we are enabled, in some slight degree, to sympathize with a just and holy God in His hatred of sin.

Again the Israelitish army is victorious. God is now with the children of Israel. They have obeyed God, and, therefore, His blessing follows them. Ai is razed to the ground, and this time the spoils are for the Israelites. If Achan's selfish heart had abided God's time, he might have now taken of the spoils, and have been lawfully enriched.

How many Achans, since that day, might have enjoyed the pleasant things of life, if they had only followed with rectitude the self-denying path of patient obedience to

those moral laws by which alone man attains far more happiness and more abiding riches, than can be obtained by any mode that is contrary to the just laws of God!



XXII.

THE GIBEONITES.

As soon as the Gibeonites heard of the overthrow of Jericho and Ai, they became alarmed for their own safety, and resorted to a stratagem.

Some of their people were therefore sent to Joshua, as if they were ambassadors from a far country. They appeared before Joshua, with provisions dry and mouldy, and with garments old and rent. Trusting to their representations, Joshua made peace with them, and promised they should live. This promise the princes of Israel confirmed by an oath.

At the end of three days, the Israelites discovered that these Gibeonites were near neighbours, and dwelt among them.

The act of Joshua and his princes was so

completely human, and such a reflection of the natural heart, that we become intensely interested.

Joshua was just flushed with the victory over Ai, when these destitute-looking men appeared before him. Had there been anything strong and vigorous in their appearance, Joshua might have doubted his own powers, and have asked counsel of the Lord. But Joshua judged from outward appearances, and as he felt no need of help, he did not seek that counsel which would have delivered the Israelites from a people whom they never had power to cast off.

Man, in the hour of victory, puts aside his armour; he feels no longer the need of defence; his very success dims his sight; he has reached the mountain-top, and, unconsciously, his next step may precipitate him to the depths below. To stop securely in our upward path, we must walk humbly, and rest our security on the sacred promise that the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.

The well-known proverb tells us that union is strength. In the general acceptation of the phrase, there is much truth in the expression. When the wicked, however, in their strength, unite to overcome those whom God wills to bless, then is their union as impotent as was that of the combined forces of the Canaanitish kings. Angry with, and jealous of the Gibeonites, these petty kings put aside their little animosities, and united together to revenge themselves upon the men of Gibeon.

Being called upon so suddenly to defend the Gibeonites, Joshua, before leaving Gilgal, sought to know the will of God. He must, indeed, have felt his faith greatly tried, as he had to defend the very people with whom he had made a league contrary to the divine command, and he well knew that if he had first inquired of the Lord he would have been spared the unhappiness and misery that followed so rash an act.

How many of us thus bring sorrow upon

ourselves! Ever tardy in seeking counsel from above, we seem desirous to obtain heavenly guidance only when our path is encompassed by thorns and difficulties which, through our own indiscretion, we have interwoven.



XXIII.

JOSHUA.

THE men of Gibeon sent to Joshua to come and defend them against the Amorites, and the Lord commanded Joshua not to fear, for they should be all delivered into his hands.

With such a promise, how fully Joshua must have realized the nearness of God, especially when he asked, in the presence of all Israel, that the works of God's hands should be stayed; that, for that day, the glorious tints of the setting sun should not dye the western sky; that the shades of evening should not close around them; and that no moon should cast its silvery light on the carnage of that battlefield. Thus did the Lord permit the material world to aid in the destruction of His enemies.

Joshua, being old and stricken in years, divided the land by lot amongst the children of Israel. At this time Caleb reminded Joshua of the promise made to him by Moses, that when the children of Israel entered the land of Canaan, he, Caleb, for having brought a truthful account of the country and its inhabitants, should have for his possession that part of the country where his feet had first trodden.

Though forty-five years had passed away since the promise had been made, yet it was fulfilled, and Hebron was given to Caleb as a possession. Thus, after his long wandering in the wilderness, he was permitted to enter the promised land. In this manner Caleb was doubly blessed; and though the truly just man is ever content with the peace of his own conscience, still he who seeks first to act rightly will often find his pathway strewn with many a blossom and fruit cast from the heavenly garner.

The character of Joshua calls forth many a

pleasing thought. Brought out of Egypt, and delivered from a life of slavery and bondage, he was chosen as one of the spies to view the promised land. Like Caleb, he also delivered a true and faithful account of the country and its inhabitants. After forty years of training in the wilderness, he became the successor of Moses, and the leader of God's chosen people into the promised land. There, fighting under the Lord's banner, he proved a successful general, and beheld the tribes, one after another, possessing their allotted portions, till at last every one was enabled to enjoy the fruit of his own vine and fig-tree, no man in that happy land daring to make him afraid.

How cheering to review such a life as that of Joshua! Born in bondage, released from his fetters, disciplined in the wilderness, and at last joyfully passing over the Jordan into the promised land. What a beautiful type of the Christian's course!

Joshua's last remaining strength was given

to warn and bless the tribes of Israel. He appears to have lingered with some fear and trembling over their future career, and to have seen, with a prophetic eye, how their happiness would be destroyed by their forsaking the commands of the Lord their God.

Like Joshua, let us all strive to spend our time, our talents, and our all in the service of our heavenly Father, who is always ready to bless the work which He has given each one of us to do.



XXIV.

IDOLATRY.

WORSHIP is natural to man, for wherever human beings congregate, there will be some form of homage, either to the seen or the unseen.

As it is with the young mind, so it is with infant nations, that impressions of the unseen are soon eclipsed by anything visible or tangible in form or colour. Only as the soul becomes more and more elevated can it realize the union of spirit with spirit. Then, and not till then, can faith be said to have commenced its work.

It is, therefore, not astonishing that the Israelites should have turned to worship the gods of the surrounding nations; for in disobeying God, through mingling with those

heathen nations, their souls became tainted, and thereby they lost the power of living upon the unseen.

But, having been taught to walk in the light, the Israelites could not fully trust the heathen gods; therefore, in great national afflictions, they were ready to turn to a leader or judge who served only the God of their fathers.

Under such a guidance they abandoned, from time to time, the gods of the surrounding nations; but, when once delivered from their enemies, their carnal minds quickly turned to any of the gods that most attracted their senses.

The most cursory reader cannot peruse the Lord's dealings with His chosen people without being struck with His long-suffering kindness. They were continually falling into the sin of idolatry. Indeed, it was their national sin. They, whose forefathers had literally lived upon miracles; for whom the natural elements had stayed their course;

they, the chosen race of the Most High, were continually rebelling against the Lord their God. Yet when they groaned by reason of the oppression of their enemies, God was near and mighty to save. The same God is our God, bearing in like manner with us, who so frequently display the same Israelitish spirit.

It was for this very sin of idolatry that God permitted Jabin, king of Canaan, to oppress the Israelites; and, in their hour of affliction, they again cried unto the Lord. Would this long-suffering God again forgive them? again listen to their promises of repentance? Yes, God would again send them deliverance, although He knew that, before the first flush of victory was over, their stubborn and rebellious hearts would, through their worldly spirit and the influence of their heathen wives, give the glory to some fashionable idol of wood or stone.

Though the Moabites were subdued, it was not to the honour of the men of Israel. No!

the voice of the Lord came to Deborah, a prophetess, a woman judging Israel; a position higher than that of a queen of a civilized nation; for in the position of Deborah, as judge, was combined the control of the spiritual, the judicial, and the political affairs of the Israelitish nation.

By the divine command, Deborah called Barak to take with him ten thousand men to the river Kishon, where he should encounter Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army; but, although Barak had the divine promise of success, he would not go unless Deborah accompanied him.

Sisera, seeing his hosts overthrown, fled away on foot, and entered for safety the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; but, while Sisera was fast asleep and weary, Jael took a nail and a hammer and smote Sisera, so that he died. Thus a great victory was accomplished through the acts and inspiring faith of two women.

What cannot woman do when all the

highest attributes of her character are spiritually developed? It is from the cradle to the grave that the last touch of woman's power vibrates. From her influence, all families, people, and nations decay, and become as nothing, or else rise to the might, power, and dignity for which man was created. The fall of all nations has arisen when woman has departed from the true and the beautiful in the spiritual world. If that unseen power is not possessed, any other influence is but a discordant wail proceeding from harps whose chords are broken, and whose tones can never blend into heavenly harmony.

Not two generations passed away before their intermarriages with idolatrous nations brought upon the Israelites the anger of the Lord, so that they could not stand before their enemies.

If the Israelitish woman had but been faithful to the God of Israel, her nation would have now been the glory and admiraration of the world. But their high destiny

is yet to be fulfilled. May not every observing mind see it advancing? Is not their authority already felt? Look at the power which they exercise over people and nations by their wealth. See their influence in literature, through which they are undermining the faith of the Gentile nations, and spreading abroad that freethought which is one of the leading features among the modern Jews; recognising as they do the fact, that as the Gentile nations cast away their light and truth, so will the Jewish nation advance in might and power, until at last it shall become, according to the promise of the Lord, the most blessed of all the nations on the earth.

Let the signs of the times make us more watchful over every jewel of truth in God's word; and let us ever show a bold front to those who would lightly esteem Him who is our Truth and Salvation.

XXV.

GIDEON, JEPHTHAH, AND SAMSON.

WHEN we are desirous to see faith exemplified, we naturally turn to the Old Testament characters; for there, in the midst of their faults, failings, and virtues, we catch a glimpse of ourselves. Who has not, from time immemorial, rejoiced over the doubting Gideon, causing many an one to realize the great truth that it is the same God who, in His condescending love, answered and re-answered those prayers of Gideon? Though they contained so little faith, yet that little was not despised.

Since Gideon's faith was strengthened by the Lord's gracious answers, hundreds of years have rolled away, and scenes and

times have changed; but He who knoweth no beginning nor ending remains the same unchangeable God, and is as ready now to answer the prayer of little faith as He was to Gideon.

Only impulsive and ardent souls are likely to fall into the error that Jephthah committed; and although this is not the age in which one is likely to suffer for making vows, yet many a promise made in the heat of the moment is found in aftertimes difficult to fulfil.

There are many promises that prove blessings, both to ourselves and to others; but, before made, they should be prayerfully and thoughtfully considered. If not, they may become weakeners instead of strengtheners to the character.

In reading of the angel of the Lord appearing to the mother of Samson, we look eagerly towards his life, to see the impress that he left behind; but we turn away dis-

appointed, feeling that many a general, with little physical strength, could, with the blessing of God, accomplish more.

With all Samson's physical strength, which in his day was no light talent, why do not we behold greater results? Simply because his moral strength was so weak.

A man, that an army could not subdue, held captive by a treacherous woman, and, at last, through her, finally overcome! What a sight to behold! A man, whose strength we cannot comprehend, goes forth in all his might, enters the house of Delilah, and whilst sleep is casting oblivion on all around, his strength gradually departs from him! He awakes, and, like a lion that would stretch forth his limbs, Samson goes out to arouse his slumbering energies. But, no; that strength is gone!—he cannot now call it forth! Oh, the agony and humility of that moment none but a Samson could know.

He, of all men, to be led captive! To wear chains that he must have felt he

himself had forged! To feel, while in that prison-house, what he might have been, and what he might have done for his nation, if he had but endeavoured to fulfil the end for which he was created!

How many Samsons have failed since that day! Men possessing some mighty talent, yet how little have they accomplished!

Though such a sight may make us exclaim, 'Humanity, how frail thou art!' still we behold in that frailty the freedom of man, whose independent will, either for right or for wrong, raises him so far above all other created beings.

Man, having been created in the image of God, must ever endeavour to rise above all sensual surroundings. In this way only will he be enabled to show his union with Him who alone can give the power to pass beyond all the quicksands and shoals that encompass the paths of the children of men.

XXVI.

RUTH.

WHAT a sweet portrait of woman does the history of Ruth present!

There is nothing grand nor startling in her character, but she comes before us like a true-hearted and loving woman.

Her sister-in-law appears and vanishes from our view, and we scarcely note either her presence or her absence. She fails to move our sympathy, therefore our interest in Ruth is kept up unbroken, and we turn to listen to the music of her words, half wondering how, with so little sound, so many chords are struck.

We are not left long to question why so much moral beauty is developed in a single act; for we hear welling up from a heart

that has tasted the joys of a spiritual life, 'Thy God shall be my God.' Thus we find that it was a heavenly key-note that brought forth so much music in her after-life.

This Moabitish woman had cast aside her blocks of wood and stone, and could not again return to them. What were home, kindred, and country to her without God? Therefore she would cleave to Naomi. Outward things might vanish, still she would possess perennial joys that would never die.

Though her loving nature was made happier in following and comforting the desolate Naomi, yet her love to the God of Israel was the mainspring of all her acts.

It is a pleasant thought to follow Ruth in the gleaning field, wandering among the sheaves, and speaking and acting with so much simplicity and naturalness.

Ruth's presence in the gleaning field has unconsciously given to all nature at that season of the year a greater charm.

We should not look or expect to receive in

this world our reward for well doing, though even here they who do good are often doubly blessed; for our Heavenly Father delights to give abundantly out of His store-house, but not to the spiritual injury of His children. Thus the earthly blessing is often withheld, because the heart is not like Ruth's, humble and gentle.

All lights and shades of character are reflected from the holy Book; but we do not find therein another woman who casts around her so many virtues.

See with what a loving and unselfish spirit Ruth follows Naomi. Then look at her constancy, for Ruth will not leave Naomi. And with what humility does Ruth ask Naomi's permission before entering the gleaning field.

When Ruth became a wife and happy mother, she was still to Naomi the same loving Ruth; and even the women of Israel said of Ruth that she was better to Naomi than seven sons.

Truly, Ruth was a lovely type of womanhood; and will ever remain a fit example to show that woman needs neither station nor riches to enable her to brighten the path of those by whom she may be surrounded.

XXVII.

HANNAH.

In our journey through life most of us discover how very few outward things are capable of making a lasting impression upon us. One might almost imagine there was some agency at work, either overlaying or removing the objects that pass so rapidly before our view. For instance, in visiting a picture gallery, how few, out of the many pictures we look at, become our silent companions through life. Before the truly beautiful will enter our souls, the subtle essences of our nature must all be in harmony, and so cause our affections to blend with the spiritual and intellectual. At that moment such new impressions will become our own, never again to be effaced.

Thus it is with many a Bible scene. Though each character is true to nature, yet only souls possessing similar attributes can gather from such portraits comfort and consolation. Therefore each individual, when his road is dark and uncertain, may find among the many characters displayed in Holy Writ some landmark to lead him on to a brighter and fuller light.

There are characters, however, which, like some material things, universally charm. Not that they become part of ourselves, but their influence unconsciously floats around us, just as the bright rays of the setting sun clothe all surrounding objects with their passing glory.

The life of Hannah is one from which every beholder may draw some great truth or spiritual lesson.

And with what power the sacred writers bring before their readers the lives, characters, and scenes described! It is true one may often wish that more had been said,

although that would have diminished the priceless value of the whole, and have weakened the deep impression one now gains by having often to fill up, through our mental vision, the interstices of subjects that might otherwise have appeared not fully linked together.

In the instances that are mentioned in Scripture, where men possessed more wives than one, it will be always found that it was a cause of domestic discomfort.

We are quite sure that Hannah did not murmur at the Lord's dealings with her; but her heart was sorely wounded by the provocations that she continually received from Peninnah.

And what woman cannot sympathize with Hannah, especially in those times when children were looked upon as peculiar blessings from the Lord?

We are not left in doubt as to what kind of spirit pervaded those heart-appealing prayers that arose from Hannah's soul, which was too

full to give utterance to words, as she stood in the temple of the Lord; but the gentle answer she gave to Eli's accusation is enough. Eli, too, must have felt the upper note, as he strove so quickly to overlay his rebuke with a heavenly blessing. The kind old priest's words seem to have sent healing to the sore and troubled heart of Hannah, for they were a response to her wish, causing her faith at that moment to triumph, and she left the temple realizing that the answer to her request had been given.

Another yearly sacrifice returns, and we see Elkanah, with his household, going up to the temple of the Lord. But where is Hannah, the now happy mother of little Samuel? Has she nothing to bring unto the Lord? Turn and look into that Israelitish tent, and there behold in that joyous face the incense of a grateful heart, a heart ready and willing to fulfil her sacred vow as soon as her slumbering babe is old enough to be transferred to the Temple of the Lord.

When little Samuel no longer needed a mother's care, Hannah went up to the yearly sacrifice to pay her vow unto the Lord, and, with a heart full of gratitude, she hastened to present her child to abide in the Temple continually.

How unlike the proud of heart, to whom the remembrance of a past gift is often painful! Lightly is the possession esteemed of that which was so greatly desired. Even the return of what was never their own is frequently grudged.

O daughter of Israel, help us to rise to thy standard, and to grace our homes with the jewels of faith, humility and gratitude!



XXVIII.

THE ARK OF THE LORD.

At three different times did the Lord call unto Samuel when he was asleep, and each time Samuel mistook the voice for the voice of Eli. When at length Eli perceived it was the Lord that had called Samuel, he told the child to go and lie down, and, if the voice called him again, he was to rise up and say, 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.' Samuel obeyed. The voice called once more, and Samuel immediately replied in the words of Eli, 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.' Then the Lord revealed unto Samuel all the judgments that were to overtake the house of Eli.

We should not leave this point of Samuel's character until we have extracted some nectar

from altitudes that are so seldom reached. What charm to behold the alacrity with which little Samuel arose at the first sound of his name! nor is he weary in treading the floor of the Temple again and again. With what ready submission, what sweetness of temper and strict obedience, does Samuel carry out the old priest's commands! Ah! the Lord knew Samuel's heart, and how ready he would be to respond to the Lord's call.

Samuel naturally feared to reveal to Eli the vision he had had; but, at Eli's request, he told him all that would befall him. Through the Divine help Eli was enabled to say, 'It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good.' May we also, in the hour of affliction, be thus enabled to speak!

Eli must have felt how grievously he had sinned in not restraining his sons from their evil ways, for the judgments that fell upon the Israelites at this time arose from the bad example of Eli's children. The Philistines, in warring against the Israelites, were victo-

rious, and the Israelites then sent for Eli's sons to bring the Ark of the Lord into the camp, thinking thereby to obtain the divine presence and assistance. But, having forsaken the Lord their God in the time of prosperity, the Israelites now, in the hour of their need, could render unto the Lord only the husk without the kernel. Forms and ceremonies, without the spirit, are but vain oblations that can never ascend to the realms on high.

The camp was no place for the Ark of the Lord, for how could the Lord dwell with them when their conduct showed they were, in spirit, separated from the Lord their God? That very act would naturally call forth God's just displeasure; for how did they dare to remove the Ark without having first inquired of the Lord?

One is therefore not surprised to see the Israelites again overthrown, and the Ark of the Lord taken, and to find, according to the word of the Lord, that Hophni and Phinehas,

the sons of Eli, had been slain. We need not be astonished, when this news reached Eli, that the aged priest, in his great grief, fell back and expired.

Thus we see the misery and bondage that fell upon a nation for the want of discipline in one man's family.

God's judgments, however, rested upon the Philistines during the whole time they detained the Ark; for, to whatever village or place they sent the Ark, there did God afflict the people.

The Philistines at length consulted their own priests, who advised them to put the Ark into a new cart, and to tie two milch kine to the cart, and if they went by the way of Beth-shemesh, then would they know that God had brought all this evil upon them. When the Philistines saw the miraculous manner in which the kine took the straight way to Beth-shemesh, they confessed it was not chance, but God's hand, that had been heavy upon them.

Though the Philistines were thus made to feel that the God of Israel was above all gods, yet their heathenish minds would not turn from the worship of the seen to the unseen.

Truly, the universal type of man remains the same in all ages. We see even at the present day, that when God's judgments are abroad on the earth, many worldly men will often confess God's power, but, like the Philistines, will still continue in their former sinful ways; their only desire being to be freed from the presence, power, and judgments of Him whom they desire not to comprehend.

The Ark rested in the house of Abinadab until the time of king David, who gathered together thirty thousand chosen men of Israel and went up to Gibeah to bring the Ark to Jerusalem. On this occasion, however, the Ark was not brought further than the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite, where it was left for a time, on account of the conduct of

Uzzah,' who had touched the Ark when it was at Nachon's threshing-floor. Uzzah's act cost him his life, for he was smitten by the hand of the Lord and died.

If Uzzah's conduct had arisen simply through thoughtlessness and irreverence, God would not have visited upon him such a severe punishment as death; for God's dealings with the children of men are not arbitrary; but Uzzah, as a Levite, knew that the Ark was being removed contrary to the divine command. Instead of being covered up and carried by the priests, the Ark was placed in a cart and exposed to the eyes of the multitude. As far as the Philistines were concerned it was a very different thing. They had acted according to their knowledge; but for a Levite to follow the example of heathens in this matter was a very grievous sin indeed.

Evidently the Israelites had become very lax and neglectful in holy matters; therefore the judgment upon Uzzah was likely to

excite respect and reverence towards God's commands.

After a time the Ark of the Lord was removed to the city of David, amidst shouting, music, and dancing, causing great joy to the people. When, however, Michal, Saul's daughter, saw king David leaping and dancing before the Ark of the Lord, it displeased her, and she despised him in her heart.

Does not the same spirit exist at the present day? When God's people express their gladness in the Lord, how many there are who, like Michal, look on and turn away in disgust, forgetting the words of our blessed Saviour, that 'Whosoever, therefore, shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven.'



XXIX.

SAUL.

SAMUEL being now an old man, made his sons judges over Israel, but as they did not follow in the ways of their father, the elders of Israel desired a king. This request displeased Samuel, but when he inquired of the Lord, he was commanded to make them a king.

When the asses belonging to Kish, the father of Saul, were lost, Saul, with his servant, was sent to seek for them; and as they could not be found, Saul determined to inquire of Samuel, who soon set his mind at rest about them, and detained him till the next day. Before Saul departed, Samuel anointed him as king.

It was not long before Saul showed what

manner of spirit he was of. On one occasion, wanting to know the mind of the Lord, and Samuel not appearing at the appointed time, he dared to take the place of the priest, and offered the burnt-offering. The next act of disobedience was in sparing Agag, king of the Amalekites, and also the best of the sheep and oxen, when the command had gone forth from the Lord that he was utterly to destroy everything. When reproved by Samuel for this act, Saul, in a most wilful spirit, declared that he had obeyed the voice of the Lord, but it was the people who had taken of the spoil. What a mean and unkingly act, to refer the transgression to those whom he ought to have helped to carry out the commands of the Lord!

Thus, from one descending step to another, did Saul's unsanctified and arbitrary will conduct him, until his heart became so evil, that God's good spirit found no room to dwell therein. If it had been a troubled spirit, on account of his sins, we know that

God would not have left him to himself; but it was a rebellious spirit, because the Lord had rejected him from being king.

It seems that from the tree of disobedience all other sins branch forth; for, had Saul obeyed the word of the Lord, and destroyed king Agag, and everything belonging to the Amalekites, he would have been spared his deceit and wretchedness, and the loss of his kingdom; but from that one act how many sins followed!

What deep lessons are unfolded to us by the various Scripture characters that are brought prominently before our view! Looking at Saul, we see, step by step, the workings of his evil heart. Disobedience in him produced a corresponding result to that which it did in our first parents, viz., Paradise taken from them; his kingdom taken from him. What followed? Not repentance. Oh no! His heart was too evil to give out such a Christian grace. Where the Lord's chastisements do not humble, they are sure

to harden. So hardened did Saul's heart become, that the one desire of his life seemed to be the destruction of David. Thus, he appeared to be wilfully fighting against the providence of God, for Saul knew that David had been divinely appointed to become king.

The sins of a wicked man, when clearly perceived, may become like lights from a beacon, which warn the mariner to escape from the rocks and shoals that surround him.

How different was the conduct of David! Though pursued by Saul from place to place, yet when Saul fell into the hands of David, he was safe; for was not Saul the anointed of the Lord? Therefore David showed his faith and trust in God, by forgiving and honouring him whom the Lord had honoured.

Thus we see the evil traits of Saul's character expanding with his years. Disobedience, followed by untruthfulness, then by jealousy and hatred, and at last by that most cowardly of all acts, viz., self-murder.

Who would have thought, as Saul

wandered with his father's servant to find the lost asses, that the seeds of so much wickedness dwelt beneath so beautiful an exterior? Well might the Lord say to Samuel, when he was struck with the commanding appearance of Eliab, 'Look not on his countenance, for the Lord seeth not as man seeth.'



XXX.

DAVID.

We read that the Lord commanded Samuel to go and anoint David as king of Israel; but Samuel, feeling afraid lest Saul, if it came to his knowledge, should kill him, went on his journey with the apparent motive of only offering a sacrifice to the Lord.

We here notice Samuel using a wise caution in the prosecution of his object. A due amount of this virtue is a rare gift. If not carefully used, however, it will degenerate into policy and deceit. Those who possess but little judgment, and lack self-control, will often despise this habit, inferring that it is the mother of prevarication and deceitfulness.

This particular work which God had given

Samuel to do must have been very painful to him, for he was still mourning that the Lord had rejected Saul from being king over Israel. Therefore, to go and anoint another to be king, while Saul was still alive, and the danger of thereby provoking Saul, must have made it no slight undertaking. Thus we see again and again, that they who fulfil their appointed mission in this life must often do and perform work from which the frailty of our human nature shrinks; but, like the waves breasting against the wind, and which return with a double force, so will all characters be proportionately stronger according to the amount of difficulties and trials which they have encountered and overcome.

David, like all men, had his besetting sins; but his good qualities were of a noble order. His spirit of forgiveness in the hour of persecution stands before us like some hoary mountain which we behold while sailing on the waters below. We may understand his sweet forgiveness of Saul. With such a long

persecution it was grand and noble, for the offence was only on Saul's side; but the suffering, all caused through Saul, was on David's side.

Nor did Saul exercise his vindictive spirit for a short time only, for David had to bear and to suffer, not by days or weeks or months, but by years.

Then, when David heard of the death of his cruel persecutor, what do we hear? No joyful strain; but David mourns, he weeps, he fasts, and, in the depth of his anguish, he exclaims, 'How are the mighty fallen!' Truly David fulfilled the Divine command, 'Love your enemies.'

David's strong loving nature makes his virtues stand out so royally that, if we did not see his dark sins, we should think it almost impossible to climb so high; but those very sins make us feel his goodness more attainable.

Who has ever beheld a friendship like that of Jonathan and David? Surely some

sprays of love must have fallen from the wings of an angel, so pure and heavenly does their love appear. Friendship is not uncommon. It abounds in every walk of life; but the stability, depth, and purity of this virtue vary as much as the sky in a summer storm.

There are but few ardent souls who have not experienced, at some time or other in life, that a friendship, which they had hoped to be eternal, was founded upon some shifting islet. Each wave of circumstance that washed over it changed the aspect of the scene, and the spot that looked so fresh and verdant gradually drifted away, till at last the sweet echoes of the past were lost in the depths below. A lasting friendship can dwell only in hearts where both possess those adhesive qualities which circumstance and time can never dissolve.

David was, by nature, a truly humble man, and the diadem which encircled his brow never dimmed the brightness of this heavenly

grace. After years of kingly prosperity he was called to flee from his palace, because of the insurrection of Absalom. While pursuing his flight David encountered Shimei, a man of the family of Saul, who rejoiced to see the downfall of the king, and increased David's affliction by cursing and casting stones at him. David meekly bore Shimei's conduct, knowing that this man could have no power to afflict him unless it was by the will of God. Thus David, in forgiving Shimei, passed by the agent of his affliction, and through faith saw only the mighty hand of Him who doeth all things well. If an earthly king could so quickly and readily forgive, how much more the King Eternal, who ruleth the hearts of the children of men!

When God created this beautiful world, it was not at once a fit habitation for man to dwell in. Each portion of this glorious universe had to undergo a long preparatory work before man was called into existence. God still carries on the same patient waiting

work in all that surrounds us, for there is scarcely a material body that has not required ages to prepare it for our use. We may look at our fires, and think of the ancient forests and the deep waters that have washed over those trees that now no longer belong to our clime. We open our purses to give joy to some poor stricken soul, and the very metal that rings so musically to the homeless wanderer has been waiting countless ages to reach a state fitted for this use.

But who can make mention of the unnumbered mercies that surround a created being, all arising from the mighty power of Him who, out of chaos, was preparing every means for the comfort and happiness of man? What God has done, and is still doing, in the material world, may be looked upon as the reflection of that higher work which our Heavenly Father is ever carrying on in the soul of man. Everything, whether material or spiritual, must be prepared for its use. The earth lies fallow for a season, that it may

be thus enabled to enrich the vegetable world with its productions. We talk of the chrysalis being dormant—dormant implying a negative state—but it has been a preparing state, which eventually has called forth the lovely butterfly from so curious an object. The earth also could not dispense with one of its seasons. There must be seed-time and harvest, and summer and winter. And in like manner must there be the same for man, in order that he also may be well able to perform his work.

Now let us turn and look at David. He was sowing good seed when he was a shepherd boy, and, as he tuned his harp and praised his God among those lovely hills, his soul caught the reflex of the surrounding beauty, and imbibed that strong faith which no earthly trial could ever obliterate. After his seed-time came the first harvest of faith, in his destruction of Goliath. Then again, how many hot summer days of prepared work had not David, during those

seven years of persecution from Saul—sleeping in caves—wandering in the wilderness—having to fight many an outward and inward battle before he was deemed fit to be king over all Israel. Yet if David had not had such a seed-time and harvest and summer, he would not have possessed, in the winter season of his life that richness of character which gave power to his kingdom, nor should we have possessed those divine melodies which have cheered and comforted the hearts of innumerable sin-sick souls.



XXXI.

SOLOMON.

All who carefully peruse the Bible must be greatly impressed with the simplicity with which its characters are portrayed. We often find uninspired writers labouring over two or three volumes before they have delineated a character which they desire to set before their readers; but, with many of the Bible characters, they are suddenly brought before us and as quickly withdrawn, while only a few relative words have been spoken; and yet there is left in our minds such a vivid impression of the whole man, that we feel at once strengthened and invigorated by such a portrait of human nature. It is not that we are so much arrested by the virtue therein depicted, as by the combination of the evil

and the good, making us feel the oneness of humanity.

How many in the hours of sin, sadness, and temptation, have turned for comfort to the life of David; and while they beheld him sinning and repenting, then trusting and finding favour in God his Father, have felt they could likewise raise their drooping hearts, and pierce with the eye of faith through those leaden clouds, to behold a more glorious and brighter light than that ever revealed to David.

One may venture to say that the Bible, as a whole, would have been imperfect had there been no Solomon found in it. 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,' would have been an empty sound had not the preacher possessed every earthly good.

In looking at Solomon's life, as he ascends the throne, we behold a bright picture of humanity. There we see him walking in the fear of the Lord, obeying the commands of his father David, seeking wisdom as the

greatest good, displaying the manliness that is embedded in all human nature; not crouching to slavish fear, but acting with a dignity that unconsciously envelops those whose virtues are produced by a spiritual life.

In writing to Hiram, the heathen king of Tyre, for assistance towards building the temple, Solomon expressly mentioned the purpose intended, viz., that he might build a house unto the Lord his God. Though Hiram knew nothing about Israel's Jehovah, nevertheless he rejoiced to find that Solomon honoured the God he worshipped. Thus Solomon brought respect to his faith by the consistency of his conduct. And may not we say that, if, through fear, a man should overshadow his manliness by hiding his principles, he will never gain the esteem he may be most anxious to win.

Solomon had received full instructions, from David his father, concerning the building of the Temple. He knew he was divinely appointed for the work, and at once he set

himself diligently to perform what was given him to do.

Who is there that, like Solomon, has not his appointed work? Though we may mingle among the meanest of the children of earth, still, if we bend a listening ear, we may hear the soft whisper from our own inner life saying, 'This is the way; walk ye in it.' A heart thus attuned will soon find its appointed work. Even as God visited and blessed the work of Solomon in building the Temple, so will He bless the lowliest of our works, provided only the temple of our hearts be consecrated to Him.

Thus we see Solomon, in the days of his youth, serving God with a gladsome heart; but in his old age, through the influence of heathen wives, he was turned from the Lord God of Israel. One feels it could not have been the wisdom or goodness of those strange women that thus caused the wisest of men to worship blocks of wood and stone; but, having sinned by his union with heathen

women, Solomon's soul became less sensitive to the commands of God, and being continually surrounded by such an atmosphere, he wandered from the pure stream and partook of the brackish waters, that thickened and became more turbid in their onward course.

So surely will it be with all who leave the true and beautiful, and surrender themselves to earthly objects. How watchful, therefore, should we all be that the influences by which we are surrounded shall be of that nature that will depress the carnal, and elevate the spiritual in us.

From the example and experience of Solomon, we see that neither riches, honour, power, nor earthly wisdom can satisfy the desires of the human heart. Nothing that is material can move the springs of its inner life. Only as the heart rises towards the source of its being will it find that true happiness which will ever be beyond all earthly good.

How much our happiness would be enlarged if we could but gain juster views of

our Heavenly Father! We live so in the littles of life, that we cannot grasp that comprehensive view which perceives that there are neither great nor small things to Him who created all. Thus our faith becomes clouded, and we often lose the blessing we desire to receive through taking our own limited ideas of God, and forgetting that the world is His, and the fulness thereof, and that God is ever giving to His human family, as He did to Solomon, beyond its utmost request.

How strikingly we see energy and earnestness exemplified in the Queen of Sheba, who with much labour journeyed so far to hear the wisdom of Solomon. One cannot help thinking that a purer and holier wisdom pervaded her soul when she returned to her far Eastern home, and that, as she wandered among her spicy groves and cool retreats, her heart found a bright and holy joy in communing with Israel's God.

Solomon's son, Rehoboam, suffered for the sins of his father, for, when he ascended the

throne, he had only the tribe of Judah to govern, instead of the whole of Israel. Thus, though Solomon may have repented and received forgiveness for his sins, yet he could not prevent the suffering which he had produced. A modern writer has said that sound, when once called forth, is never lost. And so it is with sin; when once committed, it can be never gathered up, but spreads onward and onward, till it will at last, at the end of time, appear before its perpetrator, saying, 'This is thy work; give an account of thy stewardship.'

May the thought of that endless spread of sin make us all watchful and diligent in the obeying of God's commands, so that, being guided by His Holy Spirit, our works may be of that order which will flow back to that heavenly channel whence they sprang.

THE END.

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